

THE BIG KNOCKOVER

THE BIG

Edited and with an

Introduction by

LILLIAN HELLMAN

KNOCKOVER

*SELECTED STORIES
AND SHORT NOVELS OF*

**DASHIELL
HAMMETT**



Random House

New York

FIRST PRINTING

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Introduction

by
Lillian Hellman

FOR YEARS WE made jokes about the day I would write about him. In the early years, I would say, "Tell me more about the girl in San Francisco. The silly one who lived across the hall in Pine Street." And he would laugh and say, "She lived across the hall in Pine Street and was silly." "Tell more than that. How much did you like her, and—?" He would yawn. "Finish your drink and go to sleep." But days later, maybe even that night, if I was on the find-out kick, and I was, most of the years, I would say, "Okay, be stubborn about the girls. So tell me about your grandmother and what you looked like as a baby." "I was a very fat baby. My grandmother went to the movies every afternoon. She was very fond of a movie star called Wallace Reid and I've told you all this before." I would say I wanted to get everything straight for the days after his death when I would write his biography and he would say that I was not to bother writing his biography because it would turn out to be the history of Lillian Hellman with an occasional reference to a friend called Hammett.

The day of his death came almost five years ago, on January 10, 1961. I will never write that biography because I cannot write about my closest, my most beloved friend. And maybe, too, because all those questions through all the thirty-one on and off years, and the sometime answers, got muddled, and life changed for both of us and the questions and answers became one in the end, flowing together from the days when I was young to the days when I was middle-aged. And so this will be no attempt at a biography of Samuel Dashiell Hammett, born in St. Mary's County, Maryland on May 27, 1894. Nor will it be a critical appraisal of the stories in this book. There was a day when I thought all of them very good. But all of them are

not good, though most of them, I think, are very good. It is only right to say immediately that, by publishing them at all, I have done what Hammett did not want to do: he turned down offers to republish the stories, although I never knew the reason and never asked. I did know, from what he said about "Tulip," the unfinished novel that is included in this book, that he meant to start a new literary life and maybe didn't want the old work to get in the way. But sometimes I think he was just too ill to care, too worn out to listen to plans or read contracts. The fact of breathing, just breathing, took up all the days and nights.

In the First World War, in camp, influenza led to tuberculosis and Hammett was to spend years after in army hospitals. He came out of the Second World War with emphysema, but how he ever got into the Second World War, at the age of forty-eight, still bewilders me. He telephoned me the day the army accepted him to say it was the happiest day of his life and before I could finish saying it wasn't the happiest day of mine and what about the old scars on his lungs, he laughed and hung up. His death was caused by cancer of the lungs, discovered only two months before he died. It was not operable—I doubt that he would have agreed to an operation even if it had been—and so I decided not to tell him about the cancer. The doctor said that when the pain came it would come in the right chest and arm, but that the pain might never come. The doctor was wrong: only a few hours after he told me the pain did come. Hammett had had self-diagnosed rheumatism in the right arm and had always said that was why he had given up hunting. On the day I heard about the cancer, he said his gun shoulder hurt him again, would I rub it for him. I remember sitting behind him, rubbing the shoulder and hoping he would always think it was rheumatism and remember only the autumn hunting days. But the pain never came again, or if it did he never mentioned it, or maybe death was so close that the shoulder pain faded into other pains.

He did not wish to die and I like to think he didn't know he was dying. But I keep from myself even now the possible meaning of a night, very late, a short time before his death. I came into his room and for the only time in the years I knew him, there were tears in his eyes and the book was lying unread. I sat down beside him and waited a long time before I could say, "Do you want to talk about it?" He said, almost with anger, "No. My only chance is not to talk about it." And he never did. His patience, his courage, his dignity in those suffering months were very great. It was as if all that makes a man's life had come together to prove itself: suffering was a private matter and there was to be no invasion of it. He would seldom even

ask for anything he needed, and so the most we did—my secretary and my cook who were devoted to him, as most women always had been—was to carry up the meals he barely touched, the books he now could hardly read, the afternoon coffee, and the martini that I insisted upon before the dinner that wasn't eaten. One night of that last year, a bad night, I said, "Have another martini. It will make you feel better." "No," he said, "I don't want it." I said, "Okay, but I bet you never thought I'd urge you to have another drink." He laughed for the first time that day. "Nope. And I never thought I'd turn it down."

Because on the night we had first met he was getting over a five-day drunk and he was to drink very heavily for the next eighteen years, and then one day, warned by a doctor, he said he would never have another drink and he kept his word except for the last year of the one martini, and that was my idea.

We met when I was twenty-four years old and he was thirty-six in a restaurant in Hollywood. The five-day drunk had left the wonderful face looking rumped, and the very tall thin figure was tired and sagged. We talked of T. S. Eliot, although I no longer remember what we said, and then went and sat in his car and talked at each other and over each other until it was daylight. We were to meet again a few weeks later and, after that, on and sometimes off again for the rest of his life and thirty years of mine.

Thirty years is a long time, I guess, and yet as I come now to write about them the memories skip about and make no pattern and I know only certain of them are to be trusted. I know about that first meeting and the next, and there are many other pictures and sounds, but they are out of order and out of time, and I don't seem to want to put them into place. (I could have done a research job, I have on other people, but I didn't want to do one on Hammett, or to be a book-keeper of my own life.) I don't want modesty for either of us, but I ask myself now if it can mean much to anybody but me that my second sharpest memory is of a day when we were living on a small island off the coast of Connecticut. It was six years after we had first met: six happy, unhappy years during which I had, with help from Hammett, written my first play. I was returning from the mainland in a catboat filled with marketing and Hammett had come down to the dock to tie me up. He had been sick that summer—the first of the sicknesses—and he was even thinner than usual. The white hair, the white pants, the white shirt made a straight, flat surface in the late sun. I thought maybe that's the handsomest sight I ever saw, that line of a man, the knife for a nose, and the sheet went out of my hand and the wind went out of the sail. Hammett laughed as I struggled to get back the sail. I don't know why, but I yelled angrily, "So you're a

Dostoyevsky sinner-saint. So you are." The laughter stopped, and when I finally came into the dock we didn't speak as we carried up the packages and didn't speak through dinner. Later that night he said, "What did you say that for? What does it mean?" I said I didn't know why I had said it and I didn't know what it meant.

Years later, when his life had changed, I did know what I had meant that day: I had seen the sinner—whatever is a sinner—and sensed the change before it came. When I told him that, Hammett said he didn't know what I was talking about, it was all too religious for him. But he did know what I was talking about and he was pleased.

But the fat, loose, wild years were over by the time we talked that way. When I first met Dash he had written four of the five novels and was the hottest thing in Hollywood and New York. It is not remarkable to be the hottest thing in either city—the hottest kid changes for each winter season—but in his case it was of extra interest to those who collect people that the ex-detective, who had bad cuts on his legs and an indentation in his head from being scrappy with criminals, was gentle in manner, well-educated, elegant to look at, born of early settlers, was eccentric, witty and spent so much money on women that they would have liked him even if he had been none of the good things. But as the years passed from 1930 to 1948, he wrote only one novel and a few short stories. By 1945, the drinking was no longer gay, the drinking bouts were longer and the moods darker. I was there, off and on for most of those years, but in 1948 I didn't want to see the drinking any more. I hadn't seen or spoken to Hammett for two months until the day when his devoted cleaning lady called to say she thought I had better come down to his apartment. I said I wouldn't, and then I did. She and I dressed a man who could barely lift an arm or a leg and brought him to my house, and that night I watched delirium tremens, although I didn't know what I was watching until the doctor told me the next day at the hospital. The doctor was an old friend. He said, "I'm going to tell Hammett that if he goes on drinking he'll be dead in a few months. It's my duty to say it, but it won't do any good." In a few minutes he came out of Dash's room and said, "I told him. Dash said okay, he'd go on the wagon forever, but he can't and he won't." But he could and he did. Five or six years later, I told Hammett that the doctor had said he wouldn't stay on the wagon. Dash looked puzzled: "But I gave my word that day." I said, "Have you always kept your word?" "Most of the time," he said, "maybe because I've so seldom given it."

He had made up honor early in his life and stuck with his rules, fierce in the protection of them. In 1951 he went to jail because he

and two other trustees of the bail bond fund of the Civil Rights Congress refused to reveal the names of the contributors to the fund. The truth was that Hammett had never been in the office of the Committee and did not know the name of a single contributor. The night before he was to appear in court, I said, "Why don't you say that you don't know the names?" "No," he said, "I can't say that." "Why?" "I don't know why." After we had a nervous silence, he said, "I guess it has something to do with keeping my word, but I don't want to talk about that. Nothing much will happen, although I think we'll go to jail for a while, but you're not to worry because—" and then suddenly I couldn't understand him because the voice had dropped and the words were coming in a most untypical nervous rush. I said I couldn't hear him, and he raised his voice and dropped his head. "I hate this damn kind of talk, but maybe I better tell you that if it were more than jail, if it were my life, I would give it for what I think democracy is and I don't let cops or judges tell me what I think democracy is." Then he went home to bed, and the next day he went to jail.

July 14, 1965

It is a lovely summer day. Fourteen years ago on another lovely summer day the lawyer Hammett said he didn't need, didn't want, but finally agreed to talk to because it might make me feel better, came back from West Street jail with a message from Hammett that the lawyer had written on the back of an old envelope. "Tell Lily to go away. Tell her I don't need proof she loves me and don't want it." And so I went to Europe, and wrote a letter almost every day, not knowing that about one letter in ten was given to him, and never getting a letter from him because he wasn't allowed to write to anybody who wasn't related to him. (Hammett had, by this time, been moved to a federal penitentiary in West Virginia.) I had only one message that summer: that his prison job was cleaning bathrooms, and he was cleaning them better than I had ever done.

I came back to New York to meet Hammett the night he came out of jail. Jail had made a thin man thinner, a sick man sicker. The invalid figure was trying to walk proud but, coming down the ramp from the plane, he was holding tight to the railing and before he saw me he stumbled and stopped to rest. I guess that was the first time I knew he would now always be sick. I felt too bad to say hello, and so I ran back into the airport and we lost each other for a few minutes. But in a week, when he had slept and was able to eat small amounts of food, an irritating farce began and was to last for the rest

of his life: jail wasn't bad at all. True, the food was awful and sometimes even rotted, but you could always have milk; the moonshiners and car thieves were dopes but their conversation was no sillier than a New York cocktail party; nobody liked cleaning toilets, but in time you came to take a certain pride in the work and an interest in the different cleaning materials; jail homosexuals were nasty tempered, but no worse than the ones in any bar, and so on. Hammett's form of boasting—and of humor, as well—was always to make fun of trouble or pain. We had once met Howard Fast on the street and he told us about his to-be-served jail sentence. As we moved away, Hammett said, "It will be easier for you, Howard, if you first take off the crown of thorns." And so I should have guessed that Hammett would talk about his own time in jail the way many of us talk about college.

I do not wish to avoid the subject of Hammett's political beliefs, but the truth is that I do not know if he was a member of the Communist Party and I never asked him. If that seems an odd evasion between two people we did not mean it as an evasion; it was, probably, the product of the time we lived through and a certain unspoken agreement about privacy. Now, in looking back, I think we had rather odd rules about privacy, unlike other peoples' rules. We never, for example, asked each other about money, how much something cost or how much something earned, although each of us gave to the other as, through the years, each of us needed it. It does not matter much to me that I don't know if Hammett was a Communist Party member: most certainly he was a Marxist. But he was a very critical Marxist, often contemptuous of the Soviet Union in the same hick sense that many Americans are contemptuous of foreigners. He was often witty and bitingly sharp about the American Communist Party, but he was, in the end, loyal to them. Once, in an argument with me, he said that of course a great deal about Communism worried him and always had and that when he found something better he intended to change his opinions. And then he said, "Now please don't let's ever argue about it again because we're doing each other harm." And so we did not argue again, and I suppose that itself does a kind of harm or leaves a moat too large for crossing, but it was better than the arguments we had been having—they had started in the 1940's—when he knew that I could not go his way. I think that must have pained him, but he never said so. It pained me, too, but I knew that, unlike many radicals, whatever he believed in, whatever he had arrived at, came from reading and thinking. He took time to find out what he thought, and he had an open mind and a tolerant nature.

Hammett came from a generation of talented writers. The ones I knew were romantic about being writers, it was a good thing to be, a writer, maybe the best, and you made sacrifices for it. I guess they wanted money and praise as much as writers do today, but I don't think the diseased need was as great, nor the poison as strong. You wanted to have money, of course, but you weren't in competition with merchants or bankers, and if you threw your talents around you didn't throw them to the Establishment for catching. When I first met Dash he was throwing himself away on Hollywood parties and New York bars: the throwing away was probably no less damaging but a little more forgiveable because those who were there to catch could have stepped from *The Day of the Locust*. But he knew what was happening to him, and after 1948 it was not to happen again. It would be good to say that as his life changed the productivity increased, but it didn't. Perhaps the vigor and the force had been dissipated. But, good as it is, productivity is not the only proof of a serious life, and now, more than ever, he sat down to read. He read everything and anything. He didn't like writers very much, he didn't like or dislike most people, but he was without envy of good writers and was tender about all writers, probably because he remembered his own early struggles.

I don't know when Hammett first decided to write, but I know that he started writing after he left army hospitals in the 1920's, settling with his wife and daughter—there was to be another daughter—in San Francisco. (He went back to work for Pinkerton for a while, although I am not sure if it was this period or later.) Once, when I asked him why he never wanted to go to Europe, why he never wanted to see another country, he said he had wanted to go to Australia, maybe to stay, but on the day he decided to leave Pinkerton forever he decided to give up the idea of Australia forever. An Australian boat, out of Sidney for San Francisco, carrying two hundred thousand dollars in gold, notified its San Francisco insurance broker that the gold was missing. The insurance company was a client of Pinkerton's, and so Hammett and another operative met the boat as it docked, examined all sailors and officers, searched the boat, but couldn't find the gold. They knew the gold had to be on the boat, and so the agency decided that when the boat sailed home Hammett should sail with it. A very happy man, going free where he had always dreamed of going, packed his bags. A few hours before sailing time, the head of the agency suggested they give a last, hopeless search. Hammett climbed a smoke stack he had examined several times before, looked down and shouted, "They moved it. It's here." He said that as the words came out of his mouth, he said to himself,

"You haven't sense enough even to be a detective. Why couldn't you have discovered the gold one day out to sea?" He fished out the gold, took it back to the Pinkerton office, and resigned that afternoon.

With the resignation came a series of jobs, but I don't remember what he said they were. In a year or so, the tuberculosis started to cut up again and hemorrhages began. He was determined not to go back to army hospitals and, since he thought he had a limited amount of time to live, he decided to spend it on something he wanted to do. He moved away from his wife and children, lived on soup, and began to write. One day the hemorrhages stopped, never to reappear, and sometime in this period he began to earn a small living from pulp magazines and squibs and even poems sold to Mencken's *Smart Set*. I am not clear about this time of Hammett's life, but it always sounded rather nice and free and 1920's Bohemian: the girl on Pine Street and the other on Grant Street, and good San Francisco food in cheap restaurants, and dago red wine, and fame in the pulp magazine field, then and maybe now a world of its own.

July 18, 1965

This memory of Hammett is being written in the summer. Maybe that's why most of what I remember about him has to do with summer, although like all people who live in the country, we were more closely thrown together in winter. Winter was the time of work for me and I worked better if Hammett was in the room. There he was, is, as I close my eyes and see another house, reading *The Autumn Garden*. I was, of course, nervous as I watched him. He had always been critical, I was used to that and wanted it, but now I sensed something new and was worried. He finished the play, came across the room, put the manuscript in my lap, went back to his chair and began to talk. It was not the usual criticism: it was sharp and angry, snarling. He spoke as if I had betrayed him. I was so shocked, so pained that I would not now remember the scene if it weren't for a diary that I've kept for each play. He said that day, "You started as a serious writer. That's what I liked, that's what I worked for. I don't know what's happened, but tear this up and throw it away. It's worse than bad—it's half good." He sat glaring at me and I ran from the room and went down to New York and didn't come back for a week. When I did come back I had torn up the play, put the scraps in a brief case, put the brief case outside his door. We never mentioned the play again until seven months later when I had rewritten it. I was no longer nervous as he read it; I was too tired to care and I went to sleep on the couch. I woke up because Hammett was sitting beside

me, patting my hair, grinning at me and nodding. After he had nodded for a long time, I said, "What's the matter with you?" And he said, "Nice things. Because it's the best play anybody's written in a long time. Maybe longer. It's a good day. A good day." I was so shocked with the kind of praise I had never heard before that I started out of the door to take a walk. He said, "Nix. Come on back. There's a speech in the last act went sour. Do it again." I said I wasn't going to do it again. He said okay, he'd do it, and he did, working all through the night.

When *The Autumn Garden* was in rehearsal Dash came almost every day, even more disturbed than I was that something was happening to the play, life was going out of it, which can and does happen on the stage and once started can seldom be changed.

Yesterday I read three letters he wrote to a friend about his hopes for the play, the rehearsals and the opening. His concern for me and the play was very great, but in time I came to learn that he was good to all writers who came to him for help, and that perhaps the generosity had less to do with the writer than with the writing and the pains of writing. I knew, of course, about the generosity long before, but generosity and profligacy can intertwine and it took me a long time to tell them apart.

A few years after I met Dash the large Hollywood money was gone, given away, spent on me who didn't want it and on others who did. I think Hammett was the only person I ever met who really didn't care about money, made no complaints and had no regrets when it was gone. Maybe money is unreal for most of us, easier to give away than things we want. (But I didn't know that then, maybe confused it with profligacy or showing off.) Once, years later, Hammett bought himself an expensive crossbow at a time when it meant giving up other things to have it. It had just arrived that day and he was testing it, fiddling with it, liking it very much, when friends arrived with their ten-year-old boy. Dash and the boy spent the afternoon with the crossbow and the child's face was awful when he had to leave it. Hammett opened the back door of the car, put in the crossbow, went hurriedly into the house, refusing all cries of "No, no" and such. When our friends had gone, I said, "Was that necessary? You wanted it so much." Hammett said, "The kid wanted it more. Things belong to people who want them most." And thus it was, certainly, with money, and thus the troubles came, and suddenly there were days of no dinners, rent unpaid and so on; but there they were, the lean times, no worse than many other people have had, but the contrast of no dinner on Monday and a wine-feast on Tuesday made me a kind of irritable he never understood.

When we were very broke, those first years in New York, Hammett got a modest advance from Knopf and began to write *The Thin Man*. He moved to what was jokingly called the Diplomat's Suite in a hotel run by our friend Nathanael West. It was a new hotel, but Pep West and the depression had managed to run it down immediately. Certainly Hammett's suite had never seen a diplomat because even the smallest Oriental could not have functioned well in the space. But the rent was cheap, the awful food could be charged, and some part of my idle time could be spent with Pep snooping around the lives of the other rather strange guests. I had known Dash when he was writing short stories, but I had never been around for a long piece of work. Life changed: the drinking stopped, the parties were over. The locking-in time had come and nothing was allowed to disturb it until the book was finished. I had never seen anybody work that way: the care for every word, the pride in the neatness of the typed page itself, the refusal for ten days or two weeks to go out even for a walk for fear something would be lost. It was a good year for me and I learned from it and was, perhaps, a little frightened by a man who now did not need me. So it was a happy day when I was given half the manuscript to read and was told that I was Nora. It was nice to be Nora, married to Nick Charles, maybe one of the few marriages in modern literature where the man and woman like each other and have a fine time together. But I was soon put back in place—Hammett said I was also the silly girl in the book and the villainess. I don't know now if he was joking, but in those days it worried me, I was very anxious that he think well of me. Most people wanted that from him. Years later, Richard Wilbur said that as you came toward Hammett to shake his hand in the first meeting, you wanted him to approve of you. There are such people and Hammett was one of them. I don't know what makes this quality in certain men—something floating all around them that hasn't much to do with what they've done—but maybe has to do with reserve so deep that we all know we cannot touch it with charm or jokes or favors. It comes out as something more than dignity and shows on the face. In jail the guards called Hammett "sir" and out of jail other people came close to it. One night in the last years of his life, we walked into a restaurant, passing a group of young writers I knew but he didn't. We stopped and I introduced him: those hip young men suddenly turned into charming, deferential schoolboys and their faces became what they must have been at ten years old. It took me years of teasing to force out of Hammett that he knew what effect he had on many people. Then he told me that when he was fourteen years old and had his first job working for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, he had

come late to work each day for a week. His employer told him he was fired. Hammett said he nodded, walked to the door, and was called back by a puzzled man who said, "If you give me your word it won't happen again, you can keep the job." Hammett said, "Thank you, but I can't do that." After a silence the man said, "Okay, keep the job anyway." Dash said that he didn't know what was right about what he had done, but he did know that it would always be useful.

When *The Thin Man* was sold to a magazine—most of the big slick magazines had turned it down for being too daring, although what they meant by daring was hard to understand—we got out of New York fast. We got drunk for a few weeks in Miami, then moved on to a primitive fishing camp in the Keys where we stayed through the spring and summer, fishing every day, reading every night. It was a fine year: we found out that we got along best without people and in the country. Hammett, like many Southerners, had a deep feeling for isolated places where there were animals, birds, bugs and sounds. He was easy in the woods, a fine shot, and later when I bought a farm, he would spend the autumn days in the woods, coming back with birds or rabbits, and then, when the shooting season was over, would spend many winter days sitting on a stool in the woods watching squirrels or beavers or deer, or ice-fishing in the lake. (He was, as are most sportsmen, obsessively neat with instruments, and obsessively messy with rooms.) The interests of the day would go into the nights when he would read *Bees, Their Vision and Language* or *German Gun Makers of the 18th Century* or something on how to tie knots, or inland birds, and then leave such a book for another book on whatever he had decided to learn. It would be impossible now for me to remember all that he wanted to learn, but I remember a long year of study on the retina of the eye; how to play chess in your head; the Icelandic sagas; the history of the snapping turtle; Hegel; would a hearing aid—he bought a very good one—help in detecting bird sounds; then from Hegel, of course, to Marx and Engels straight through; to the shore life of the Atlantic; and finally, and for the rest of his life, mathematics. He was more interested in mathematics than in any other subject except baseball; listening to television or the radio, he would mutter about the plays and the players to me who didn't know the difference between a ball and a bat. Often I would ask him to stop it, and then he would shake his head and say, "All I ever wanted was a docile woman and look what I got," and we would talk about docility, how little for a man to want, and he would claim that only vain or neurotic men needed to have "types" in women—all other men took what they could get.

The hit-and-miss reading, the picking up of any book, made for a

remarkable mind, neat, accurate, respectful of fact. He took a strong and lasting dislike to a man who insisted mackerel were related to herring, and once he left my living room when a famous writer talked without much knowledge of existentialism, refusing to come down to dinner with the writer because he said, "He's the greatest waste of time since the parcheesi board. Liars are bores." A neighbor once rang up to ask him how to stop a leak in a swimming pool, and he knew; my farmer's son asked him how to make a trap for snapping turtles, and he knew; born a Maryland Catholic (but having long ago left the Church), he knew more about Judaism than I did, and more about New Orleans music, food and architecture than my father who had grown up there. Once I wanted to know about early glassmaking for windows and was headed for the encyclopedia, but Hammett told me before I got there; he knew the varieties of seaweed, and for a month he studied the cross-pollination of corn, and for many, many months tried plasma physics. It was more than reading: it was a man at work. Any book would do, or almost any—he was narrowly impatient when I read letters or criticism and would refer to them as my "carrying" books, good only for balancing yourself as you climbed the stairs to bed. It was always strange to me that he liked books so much and had so little interest in the men who wrote them. (There were, of course, exceptions: he liked Faulkner, and we had fine drinking nights together during Faulkner's New York visits in the thirties.) Or it is more accurate to say that he had a good time with writers when they talked about books, and would leave them when they didn't. But he was deeply moved by painting—he himself tried to paint until the summer when he could no longer stand at an easel, and the last walk we ever took was down the block to the Metropolitan Museum—and by music. But I never remember his liking a painter or a musician although I do remember his saying that he thought most of them peacocks. He was never uncharitable toward simple people, he was often too impatient with famous people.

There are, of course, many men who are happy in an army but I had never known any and didn't want to. I was, therefore, shocked, in 1942, to find that Hammett was one of them. I do not know why an eccentric man who lived more than most Americans by his own standards found the restrictions, the disciplines, and the hard work of an army enlisted man so pleasant and amusing. Maybe a life ruled over by other people solved some of the problems, allowed a place for a man who by himself could not seek out people, maybe gave him a sense of pride that a man of forty-eight could stand up with those half his age; maybe all that and maybe simply that he liked his country and felt that the war had to be fought. Whatever

Hammett's reasons, the miseries of the Aleutian Islands were not miseries to him. I have many letters describing their beauty, and for years he talked of going back to see them again. He conducted a training program there for a while and edited a good army newspaper; the copy was clean, the news was accurate, the jokes were funny. He became a kind of legend in the Alaska-Aleutian army. I have talked to many men who served with him, and have a letter from one of them:

I was a kid then. We all were. The place was awful but there was Hammett, by the time I got there called Pop by some and Grandpop by others, editor of the paper with far more influence on us, scaring us more in a way than the Colonel although I think he also scared the Colonel . . . I remember best that we'd come into the hut screaming or complaining and he'd be lying on his bunk reading. He'd look up and smile and we'd all shut up. Nobody would go near the bed or disturb him. When money was needed or help he'd hear about it and there he was. He paid for the leave and marriage of one kid. When another of us ran up a scarey bar bill in Nome, he gave the guy who cleaned the Nome toilets money to pay it and say it was his bill if anybody in the Army asked him . . . A lot of kids did more than complain—they went half to nuts. And why not? We had the worst weather in the most desolate hole, no fighting, constant williwaws when you had to crawl to the latrines because if you stood up the wind would take you to Siberia, and an entertainment program which got mixed up between Olivia De Havilland and recordings of W. H. Auden. But the main worry was women. When you'd been there a year all kinds of rumors went around about what happened to you without them. I remember nightly bull sessions in our hut about the dangers of celibacy. Hammett would listen for a while, smile, go back to reading or when the talk got too loud he'd sigh and go to sleep. (Because of the newspaper his work hours started around two A.M.) One night when the session was extra loud crazy and one kid was yelling, Hammett got off his bunk to go to work. The kid yelled, "What do you think, Pop? *Say something.*" Hammett said, "O.K. A woman would be nice, but not getting any doesn't cause your teeth or hair to fall out and if you go nuts you'd have gone anyway and if you kiddies don't stop this stuff I'm going to move into another hut and under my bed is a bottle of Scotch so drink it and go to sleep." Then he walked out to go to work. We got so scared about losing him that we never said another word like that in front of him.

But as I have said, the years after the war, from 1945 to 1948, were not good years; the drinking grew wilder and there was a lost,

thoughtless quality I had never seen before. I knew then that I had to go my own way. I do not mean that we were separated, I mean only that we saw less of each other, were less close to each other. But even in those years there still were wonderful days on the farm of autumn hunting and squirrel pies and sausage making and all the books he read as I tried to write a play. I can see him now, getting up to put a log on the fire and coming over to shake me. He swore that I would always say, "I haven't been sleeping. I've been thinking." He would laugh and say, "Sure. You've been asleep for an hour, but lots of people think best when they're asleep and you're one of them."

In 1952 I had to sell the farm. I moved to New York and Dash rented a small house in Katonah. I went once a week to see him, he came once a week to New York, and we talked on the phone every day. But he wanted to be alone—or so I thought then, but am now not so sure because I have learned that proud men who can ask for nothing may be fine characters in life and novels, but they are difficult to live with or to understand. In any case, as the years went on he became a hermit, and the ugly little country cottage grew uglier with books piled on every chair and no place to sit, the desk a foot high with unanswered mail. The signs of sickness were all around: now the phonograph was unplayed, the typewriter untouched, the beloved, foolish gadgets unopened in their packages. When I went for my weekly visits we didn't talk much, and when he came for his weekly visits to me he was worn out from the short journey.

Perhaps it took me too long to realize that he couldn't live alone any more, and even after I realized it I didn't know how to say it. One day, immediately after he had made me promise to stop reading "L'il Abner," and I was laughing at his vehemence about it, he suddenly looked embarrassed—he always looked embarrassed when he had something emotional to say—and he said, "I can't live alone any more. I've been falling. I'm going to a veteran's hospital. It will be okay, we'll see each other all the time, and I don't want any tears from you." But there were tears from me, two days of tears, and finally he consented to come and live in my apartment. (Even now, as I write this, I am still angry and amused that he always had to have things on his own terms: a few minutes ago I got up from the typewriter and railed against him for it, as if he could still hear me. I know as little about the nature of romantic love as I knew when I was eighteen, but I do know about the deep pleasure of continuing interest, the excitement of wanting to know what somebody else thinks, will do, will not do, the tricks played and unplayed, the short cord that the years make into rope and, in my case, is there, hanging loose,

long after death. I am not sure what Hammett would feel about the rest of these notes about him, but I am sure that, in his mischief, he would be pleased that I am angry with him today.) And so he lived with me for the last four years of his life. Not all of that time was easy, and some of it was very bad, but it was an unspoken pleasure that having come together so many years before, ruined so much, and repaired a little, we had endured. Sometimes I would resent the understated, or seldom stated side of us and, guessing death wasn't too far away, I would try for something to have afterwards. One day I said, "We've done fine, haven't we?" He said, "Fine's too big a word for me. Why don't we just say we've done better than most people?"

On New Year's Eve, 1960, I left Hammett in the care of a pleasant practical nurse and went to spend a few hours with friends. I left their house at twelve-thirty, not knowing that the nurse began telephoning for me a few minutes later. As I came into Hammett's room, he was sitting at his desk, his face as eager and excited as it had been in the drinking days. In his lap was a heavy book of Japanese prints that he had bought and liked many years before. He was pointing to a print and saying to the nurse, "Look at it, darling, it's wonderful." As I came toward him, the nurse moved away, but he caught her hand and kissed it, in the same charming, flirtatious way of the early days, looking up to wink at me. The book was lying upside down, and so the nurse didn't need to mumble the word "irrational." From then on—we took him to the hospital the next morning—I never knew and will now not ever know what irrational means. Hammett refused all medication, all aid from nurses and doctors in some kind of determined, mysterious wariness. Before the night of the upside-down book our plan had been to move to Cambridge because I was under contract to teach at Harvard. An upside-down book should have told me the end had come, but I didn't want to think that way, and so I flew to Cambridge, found a nursing home for Dash and flew back that night to tell him about it. He said, "But how are we going to get to Boston?" I said we'd take an ambulance and I guess for the first time in his life he said, "That will cost too much." I said, "If it does then we'll take a covered wagon." He smiled and said, "Maybe that's the way we should have gone places anyway." And so I felt better that night, sure of a postponement. I was wrong. Before six o'clock the next morning the hospital called me. Hammett had gone into a coma. As I ran across the room toward his bed there was a last sign of life: his eyes opened in shocked surprise and he tried to raise his head. But he was never to think again and he died two days later.

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Tulip

I WAS SITTING in a roothole the wind had toppled a blue spruce out of a couple of years back, watching a red fox in the shelter of a deadish blackberry clump make up its mind what to do about the odor of skunk carried across the clearing by a breeze that had also, till just a moment ago, carried the sound of field mice squeaking. Then the fox turned its head to one side to look back the way it had come and slid deftly out of sight, going the way foxes go, with a neatness that makes the whole thing seem sudden but unhurried. I thought the dogs were out; dogs make a great deal of noise in the woods and at that time I believed foxes treated dogs and men with the same sort of contemptuous wariness, but presently I heard a man's footsteps.

Tulip pushed aside some brambles a dozen feet from where the fox had stood and came into the clearing. "Hi, Pop," he said when he saw me, grinning all the way across his broad face; then, as he came nearer, "You're skinnier than ever, but they'll never kill you, will they?"

"How'd you find me?" I asked.

He jerked a big thumb back towards the house. "Somebody told me I'd maybe find you up here, but if you're hiding I don't mind jumping out and yelling peekaboo." He looked at the shotgun in my hand. "What's that for? The shooting season's over."

"There are still crows."

He shrugged his thick shoulders. "A man's silly to shoot things he doesn't want to eat. How was it in the clink?"

"You're asking me?"

He grinned. "I've never been in federal prisons, just state and local stuff. What are federal clinks like?"

"The cream of the crop, I guess, but any prison you're in is a hole."
"Don't I know it! Did I ever tell you about the time I—"

I said, "Oh, for God's sake," and reached down to fold the stool I had been using.

"All right," he said good-naturedly. "Remind me to tell you about it later. Where'd you get this dingus?" He looked down at the stool, a folding metal frame with dark-green duck seat and zippered compartments below.

"Gokey."

"What's that green and brown junk on the sides?"

"Mystik tape wrapped around the metal to keep it from shining too much in the woods."

He nodded. "You do all right by yourself, but I guess a man of your age can't be expected to squat on the ground."

"You're in your fifties yourself," I said.

"You're a lot older than that."

"Nonsense, I'll be fifty-eight this year."

"That's what I mean, Pop! You've got to take care of yourself." He stood at the edge of the roothole while I went back a dozen yards to get the Mason jar I had wedged in the fork of a young maple and asked, "And what's that?" as I returned screwing down the top.

"Rags soaked in skunk essence," I explained. "It brings deer pretty close, maybe just because it kills man-smell. I was trying it out on fox."

"You get awful childish sometimes," he said as he followed me across the clearing.

He came behind me along the game path down through the woods and the walk down through the rock garden to the house. I stuck the Mason jar in its crevice between two rocks with a third over it, unloaded the shotgun, and we went up on the porch. Two battered leather valises and a forest-green duffle bag were on the porch just outside the door.

"What's this for?" I asked. "I'm only visiting here myself."

"What kind of friends are they if a friend of yours isn't a friend of theirs? Anyhow I'll only be here a couple of days. You know I can't stand you much longer than that."

"Nothing doing. I'm trying to get a book started."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about." He put a big hand on my back and urged me towards the door. "I can talk all right out here, but you need to be sitting down with a drink in your hand."

I took him into the house, put the shotgun and folding chair in a corner of the hallway, and poured him a drink. When he looked inquiringly at me, I said, "I haven't had any of it in three years."

He sloshed his whisky and soda around the way people do when

they wish to hear the ice tinkle. "It's probably just as well," he said. "I don't remember that you carried your liquor so good."

I laughed and waved him towards a dark-red armchair. We were in the living room, a large brown, red, green and white room with a nice Vuillard over the television set. "That's not the kind of thing that annoys ex-drunks. It's being told they never did drink so awful much anyway."

"Well, as a matter of fact, you—"

"Cut it out. Sit down and let me tell you why you're going back to town after dinner. I've got a book started and—"

"That's not what you told me out there," he said.

"Huh?"

"You said you were trying to get a book started. That's what I want to talk to you about. It's silly of you—it's always been very silly of you, Pop—not to see that I—"

"Look, Tulip—if you still insist that's your name—I'm not going to write a word about you ever if I can help it. You're a dull and foolish man who goes around doing dull and foolish things he thinks someday somebody will want to write about. Anything anybody did would be dull and foolish if it was done for that reason. And where in the name of God do you get the notion that writers go around hunting for things to write about? Organizing material is the problem, not getting it. Most of the writers I know have far too many things on tap; they're snowed under with stuff they'll never get around to."

"Words," he said. "If you've got so much stuff to write about, how come you haven't done any writing for so long?"

"How do you know how much writing I've done?"

"It can't be much. Magazines used to be lousy with you. All I ever see now is reprints of your early stuff, and less and less of that."

"I don't exist just to write. I—"

"You're changing the subject," he said. "We're talking about your writing. I don't care if you want to waste some of your time playing games with little animals out there or making yourself out a hero by going to jail, but— Look, Pop, you didn't go to jail just for the experience, did you? Because I could have saved you a lot of time and bother by telling you all you'd really have to know."

I said, "I'll bet you."

He shrugged, drank, wiped his lips with a thick forefinger and said, "That's just like a lot of other things you say, it doesn't mean a damned thing. You just say it. You writers have got more words than—" He looked around the room and seemed to like what he saw. "This is a pretty good layout. Who does it belong to?"

"Some people named Irongate."

"Friends of yours?"

"No, I never heard of them."

"Okay, that's funny," he said. "Are they around?"

"So far as I know they're still in Florida."

"That makes it sillier than ever saying I couldn't stay here for a couple of days. What are they like?"

"People."

"You may be an interesting writer, but you don't talk it. What kind of people are they like? Young people? Old people? Left-handed people?"

"Paulie's probably in her early thirties, Gus is a few years older."

"Just the two of them? No children?"

"Why don't you write these answers down so we won't have to go over the whole thing again when the census man comes? Three children, ranging in age from about sixteen to maybe twelve."

His grayish eyes brightened. "Sixteen, huh? And she's only in the early thirties? A shotgun wedding?"

"How do I know? I've only known them since I got out of the Army."

"What an army that was!" He stood up with his empty glass. "Don't bother. I'll fix it myself. You forgot whatever little you knew about pouring drinks since you stopped using them yourself. We fought one hell of a war in the Aleutians, didn't we? Let's see, didn't you leave before I did?"

"I came back in September, '45."

"Then it's nearly seven years since I've seen you." He brought his drink back to the red armchair and sat down again.

"It's longer than that. The last time I saw you was on Kiska, and I haven't been there since '44."

"'44? '45? What the hell difference does it make? What are you, a lousy historian going through life with a calendar in your hand? Tell me more about these Irongates. Have they got money?"

"Oh, so you don't like being reminded of Kiska? I guess they have. I don't know how much."

"What does he do?"

"Paints pictures, but he doesn't make a living out of that. I think his old man left him some dough."

"His old man sounds like a nice guy."

"But anyway you're not to give them the business."

He stared at me, his thick-featured face all surprised honesty under his short-clipped thick sandy hair. "What business?"

"Any business. No angles, Tulip."

"Well, I'll be good and damned," he said. "You know, that's the

hell of the prison system. It throws a man in contact with the lowest criminal elements and first thing you know he's seeing evil and skulduggery everywhere, not that you ever made much of a habit of seeing the best in your fellow man, but—"

"Besides," I said, "the FBI probably still keeps some kind of an eye on me and—"

"That's different," he said. "Why didn't you say so?"

"I didn't want to scare you away."

"Scare me? A fat chance! As a matter of fact, I'm pretty well fixed right now, sweating against silk, as the boys used to say, only that isn't exactly what they said."

"Where'd you get the potatoes?"

"Remember that crazy major that wanted us to go in for cattle-raising in the Aleutians after the war, said he could fix it with Maury Maverick to rent us one of the islands cheap?"

"For God's sake, you didn't do that? With transportation costs the—"

"No, I just happened to think about it. What was the major's name?"

"You just happened to think about it to slide around my question about where you got the dough you claim you have."

"Oh, that! I got that down Oklahoma-Texas way."

"Oil-money widow?"

He laughed. "You're a character, Pop."

"Jailhouse experience. There were some guys waiting trial for that in West Street last summer."

Tulip seemed surprised. "Jesus, how does a guy go about breaking laws to get money from women?"

"There must be some way."

I went out to the kitchen where Donald was peeling vegetables at the sink while his wife, Linda, adjusted the radio so a song called "Cry" wouldn't be so noisy and told them, "Mr. Tulip, or Colonel Tulip, if he still calls himself that—he was a lieutenant colonel in the Army—will be staying overnight, or maybe for a day or two. Will you fix him up?"

"You want him in the room next to you?" Donald asked. "Or in that yellow room down the hall?"

"Give him the yellow room. Thanks."

Tulip got up when I returned to the living room and said, "You know, I've been thinking, Pop. I ought to phone a girl I know over in Everest, and she's got a kind of cute sister, so why don't I ask them if—"

"Oh, sure, and you must have some relations in the neighborhood,

too. I can dig up some names and between us we ought to be able to get twenty or thirty people over here easily."

"It was just an idea," he said, and went over to the corner table to fix himself another drink. "Anyway, I'd rather talk to you about your writing. That's what I came for."

"You didn't. You came here to talk to me about you."

"Well, it's the same thing in a way." He went back to his chair, sat down, crossed his knees and looked me up and down. "Pop, do you want me to tell you why it is you always start to sulk as soon as anybody says anything about your writing?"

"No, I don't," I said honestly. "Get to the point. What have you been doing now that you think is so damned fascinating?"

"It's not like that." There was a touch of what could have been embarrassment in his always-husky voice. "Sometimes I don't think you understand me all the time. Did you ever run into Lee Branch down on Shemya?"

"Not that I remember. Why?"

"He was in the XIIth, a flier. No reason, I was just thinking. He was a kind of nice guy. I went down and visited him awhile after I got out."

Tulip told me about his visit, but he gave Branch a sister called Paulie—I had mentioned Paulie Irongate—he made their place sound a little like the Irongate's place, though he set it in another state, and there were shotguns in his story as there had been in my hands when he met me up in the clearing where I had been watching the fox.

Tulip was usually longwinded—especially when he thought it necessary to back into one of his tales—but the guts of what he told me, not in his language and without any of the thoughts he said he had at the time, was that Lee Branch said, "The flag is waving," and lowered his head a little to peer up under his dun hat brim through cattail tips.

Five ducks came in black against a dull pearl November sky, showing white underwings when they swept over the decoys and turned into the wind.

Tulip said, "Hit it, little man." The 20-gauge Fox was a dainty weapon in his big hands. He fired without rising from where he sat on the ground under the dying willow, first the left barrel and then the right as the lead duck hung momentarily motionless at the foot of too sharply rising an angle. Both birds hit the water together. One was dead. The other swam three-quarters of a small circle and died.

Lee Branch, up on his feet, swung his heavier gun to the right, fired, swung on and fired again. Both birds fell. One of them lost a good deal of feathers. Lee grinned down at Tulip, who was reloading.

"I guess we've got our stuff with us today, Swede."

Tulip looked complacently at the dead ducks on the dry weeds beside him and at the four on the lake. "Uh-huh." He felt in a pocket for cigarettes. "But you bazookaed the bejesus out of that first one."

"I should've waited longer. I like a gun that jumps in my hand. I think I'll get me a 10-gauge." Lee reloaded the Belgian duck gun and laid it down tenderly. "Whose turn to fetch?"

Tulip jerked a thumb at Lee and lay back on the weeds. Lee Branch was twenty-eight, with smooth dark hair parted in the middle, and of course hidden just now by his dun hat, and bright dark eyes. He was not small, but his nimble trimness—even in horse-hide clothes pushing his way through briars to the other side of the tiny island where they had hidden their boat—made him seem smaller than he was.

When he returned with the birds Tulip was lying on his back smoking with his eyes shut.

Lee said, "One of yours was another wood duck." He held it out.

"I know." Tulip opened one eye to squint through smoke at the duck. "They'd be too pretty to kill if a man wasn't always so hungry." He tossed his cigarette over the cattails into the water and stretched his arms wide on the ground. "You weren't kidding, boysie. This has been everything you said."

Lee started to speak, then squatted on his heels, his dark eyes alert. "What do you mean by has been?" he asked. "Is." A pause. "Will be." He seemed very young.

Tulip shut his eyes again. "I don't know, bub. How long have I been here?"

"A week. Ten days. I don't know. What difference does that make? When we used to talk about your coming here after the war we didn't—"

Tulip squirmed and frowned, but didn't open his eyes. "Okay, okay, but you don't think everybody ought to stick to all those post-war plans they make in the Army?"

"Of course not, but this is— This *is* different, isn't it, Swede?"

"This is by itself," Tulip said.

"Well, then?"

"Nobody's got all the answers."

"I'm not trying to tie you down, but— Listen, Swede, it's not because the place is Paulie's, is it?"

"No."

"Because she likes you and would like to have you stay."

"I'm glad she likes me," Tulip said, "because I like her plenty."

"And it's not that?"

"No."

Lee probably twisted a twig from the willow and split it with a thumb nail. "An old guy like you oughtn't to be roaming around just for the hell of it."

"I know. I don't like roaming, only things are always reminding me of something some place else." He opened his eyes and sat up, putting the Fox across his thighs. "You don't use this little gun. Want to sell it?"

"I'd give it to you, but it's Paulie's. Ask her."

Tulip shook his head. "She's bats as her brother. She'd give it to me."

"What are you? The last of the Confederates or something and don't take gifts from women?"

"I reckon you never knew many Confederates, suh. Was Paulie much in love with her husband?"

Lee looked at Tulip, who was looking out over the lake at the decoys. "I don't really know. He was a pretty good guy. You never ran into him, huh?"

"He was knocked off before I came down the Chain. They were still talking about him."

"They liked him." Lee threw the ruined willow twig away. "Why'd you ask that about Paulie?"

"I'm the nosey type, that's all."

"I didn't mean you shouldn't. Jesus, people are hard to talk to!"

Tulip shrugged his big shoulders. "You can talk to me about anything, only maybe there are some things you hadn't ought to."

"You mean things about you and Paulie?"

Tulip turned his head and looked carefully at the younger man. "Ah, the typical kid brother."

Lee reddened and laughed and said, "Go to hell." Then, after a little pause, "But that is what you mean, isn't it?"

Tulip shook his head. "I don't think there's much there you can't talk about."

Paulie Horris came around a tall whitewood tree at the far end of the lake, made a funnel of her hands and called, "Hey, murderers. The sun's down. You're ten minutes illegal."

They stood up to wave at her, picked up shotguns and dead ducks and went back through briars to the boat. Tulip stood in the stern of the boat and poled it out towards the decoys. Twice Lee Branch seemed about to say something, but he did not speak until he was leaning far over the side of the boat to pick up an artificial mallard.

Then he asked, "You're not just being a dope, are you?"

Tulip, bending to retrieve two decoys as the boat crept past them, said, "Stop mumbling."

Lee straightened up and said clearly, "Her husband being a war hero and that kind of stuff. You're not letting it throw you, are you?"

Tulip said, "Tch, tch, tch, and I thought I'd heard everything."

Lee's face reddened again. He laughed and said, "There was never any use talking to you," and they picked up the rest of the decoys.

As Tulip poled the boat towards the bathhouse Paulie Horris came around a sumac thicket from the far end of the lake and walked down to the stone dock to meet them. She was a tall dark-haired, dark-eyed woman of thirty in a gray whipcord skirt and yellowish three-quarter-length leather coat.

"You're a mighty pretty-walking woman, Mrs. Horris," Tulip called to her.

She curtsied. "Thank you kindly, sir."

Lee stowed the decoys in the bathhouse while Tulip tied up the boat so it couldn't bang against the dock if wind blew. Then, each carrying some of the ducks, they walked abreast, with the girl in the middle, up the road towards the house.

When they had walked perhaps a hundred yards, Lee Branch told his sister, "Swede's leaving."

His tone made her look sharply at him and she asked, "Well?"

Lee said, "I'm a fool, I guess, but I thought we— Well, anyhow, he's talking about leaving." He kicked a small mound of gravel apart as he walked.

She stood still and the two men stopped with her. She turned her face to Tulip and it was quite pale now. "Did he," she began, and hesitated, "did he try to buy you with me?"

Tulip said, "That's a dopey way to look at it, Paulie."

She looked down at their feet and in a very low voice said, "Yes, I guess it is," and began to walk again as before.

They came back to the house and, after he had carried his share of the ducks to the kitchen, Tulip went upstairs to his room and began writing a letter to a girl in Atlanta.

Dear Judy:

You will probably be surprised to hear from me after all these years, but for some reason I have been thinking about you a lot this past week or ten days and I have to come down to Atlanta pretty soon anyhow, so I thought . . .

Donald had come into the living room to tell us dinner was ready while Tulip was telling his version of this tale. We had gone into the dining room and Tulip had talked through most of the meal, finishing as we were starting on the dessert, black-walnut tarts. He had never gone to Atlanta, of course, though he said he had meant to. On his way down there he had stopped over in Washington and got himself lengthily involved in something to do with a veterans' organization—or a potential veterans' organization—and by that time he was not so sure that Judy would still be in Atlanta after all these years even if he had remembered her address correctly, and of course Paulie wasn't around now to remind him of Judy.

"That's all right," I said when he had finished, "but it hasn't got much to do with you. You're just a cipher in it, unless, of course, you want to admit that as soon as things or people threaten to involve you, you make up a fantasy you call the memory of something some place else to drag you away from any sort of responsibility."

Tulip lowered his forkful of tart and said, "I don't know why I waste time talking to you. Look, I told you how I felt about Paulie, and about the girl in Atlanta. I—"

"What you tell me about what went on in your head at the time has got nothing to do with anything. I'm disregarding all that."

He shook his head. "You're a pip. No wonder writing hasn't got much to do with life if that's the way writers do."

"Go on and eat," I said, "It's your thoughts on life that haven't got much to do with life. Why do you suppose you turned your back on Paulie?"

He said through the bite of tart he was chewing, "Well, I've always been a love-'em-where-you-find-'em-and-leave-'em-where-you-love-'em guy and I—"

"That's what I mean; and you expect me to call that thinking?"

He took another bite of tart and shook his head again. "You're a pip."

"Do you suppose she was right in thinking her brother had done the same thing with Horris?"

"I never did any wondering about that. Look, Pop, whatever homo there is in Lee I don't think he ever knew about. He's not a bad kid."

"The chief trouble with people like you is not that your own thoughts are so childish, but that you keep people from thinking around you."

"I know. I haven't got the right kind of oohs and ahs for the half-baked pieces of Freudism that you misunderstood in a book somewhere to bring out the best in you. Girls are better at that, aren't they?"

"Not the ones I know. I guess I'm unlucky."

"Well, when I get rested a little I'll see if I can dig you up some numbers. I never was nuts about the kind of dames you ran around with except maybe that—"

"I'd hate to think I ran around with the kind of dames you're nuts about. Want coffee here or in the living room?"

We went back to the living room and Donald brought us coffee there. Donald Poynton was a trim medium-sized Negro of thirty-five with a handsome very dark face. I liked him. He had a pretty good sense of humor that he didn't use very much unless he knew you. He said, "The dogs are out in the kitchen if you want them."

"There's no hurry," I said. "Shoo 'em in when you're through, unless they're in your way."

"The trouble with you," Tulip began when Donald had gone out, and then corrected himself. "One of the troubles with you is you're always too sure you understand me."

"I don't think I understand you very often. Where we differ is that I don't think there's very much there worth understanding."

I crossed the room to get cigars while he was saying, "Oh, so you don't think everybody's worth understanding?"

"Theoretically, yes. But there's a time element involved and I can't count on living more than fifty or sixty years more." I brought the glass jar of cigars back to him and he took one.

"Yours? Or do they go with the house?" he asked.

"Mine."

"Good. Your cigars are probably the only thing about you that I've always liked, or did you think it was your hair? If you hadn't been so sure you understood me that time in Baltimore we wouldn't've had all that trouble."

"Oh, that? That wasn't really trouble."

He bit off the end of his cigar and stared glumly at me. "You're a tough man to talk to sometimes, Pop. No wonder they sent you to jail."

"You worry too much about that time in Baltimore, about getting off on the wrong foot with me. I'd've forgotten it years ago if you didn't keep bringing it up. Why don't you give it a skip?"

He said, "You patronizing son of a bitch," but laughed when I laughed. "It really gripes you to think you're only human."

"I don't like that word *only*, unless you mean of course Everest is *only* 29,000 feet high or the blue whale is *only* the largest animal or—"

"What are you trying to do?" he asked disgustedly. "Show off to me? Or if you're getting ready to launch into one of those dull speeches about the future of the human race and mankind's unused

possibilities and potentialities I'm going to bed. Maybe you're not too old to talk that way, but I'm too old to listen to it." He burst out laughing. "Hey," he said, still laughing, "I finally read something you wrote. A fellow gave it to me in San Francisco. It's a pip."

"What is it?"

"It's in my bag, I'll show it to you tomorrow. I don't want to spoil it by telling you about it. Is it a honey! I always knew you were bats, but—" He shook his head.

"Can I get you a drink? Maybe a shot of brandy. You get yourself all upset when you think about back in Baltimore, just as you did when I mentioned Kiska. I guess you must have a lot of things in your back life to upset you when you happen to think about them."

"That's the second time tonight you've mentioned Kiska," he said, "and that certainly wouldn't be one of them. What'd you expect me to do? You know I never pulled rank much, but just the same I was a lieutenant-colonel and you were a lousy non-com who tried to—"

"There weren't any Japanese officers' overcoats left on the island then, if there'd ever been any."

"I saw 'em myself. Don't tell me that."

"A couple of guys who had been tailors in civilian life were cutting up those good Japanese blankets and sewing them up into officers' overcoats with fake tabs and stuff and the boys were peddling them to the boats for a hundred and twenty-five bucks apiece, or its equivalent in liquor, which wasn't very much liquor in those days."

"Do you mean that?"

"I mean that. And you bitched up the whole thing hunting for an overcoat cache that was never there. We had plenty of the blankets, but you knew that."

He said, "You're lying. Just for that I'm going to get that piece you wrote. Where are my bags?"

"In the yellow room. Turn right at the head of the stairs and all the way down to the end of the hall."

He went out, climbed the stairs and presently I heard his feet overhead. When he came back he had a yellowing sheet of paper in his hand. "Here," he said, "and if you can read that without laughing you're a better deadpan comic than I am."

The sheet had been cut from a weekly that had gone out of existence in the depression days of the early '30s.

"It's a book review," I said.

"It's a pip," he said.

I read:

Out of that extraordinary chaos of guesses, ambiguities, mountebankery, and vagueness which is Rosicrucian history, Arthur Edward

Waite, in *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (William Rider and Son, London, 1924), has essayed to bring orderly arrangement and evaluation of data. Painstakingly thorough, broadly experienced in mystical research, he has been successful in clearing the shelves of a vast amount of rubbish accumulated by students who in their enthusiasm have seen in each alchemist, each cabalist, each miscellaneous magician, an authentic Brother of the Rosy Cross.

Waite's facts seem always to be facts, although his reading of their implication is not always convincing. Thus, though he shows clearly that there is no actual evidence of the existence of the Rosicrucian order before the appearance, in 1614 and 1615 respectively, of the anonymous *Fama Fraternitatis R. . . C. . .* and *Confessio Fraternitatis R. . . C. . .*, and in 1616, of Johann Valentin Andreae's *Chemical Marriage*, he denies that Andreae could have been in any way a founder of the order. Supporting this denial, he quotes *Vita ab Ipso Conscripta*, in which Andreae, listing the *Chemical Marriage* among his writing of the years 1602-1603, characterizes it as a youthful jest that proved prolific of other ridiculous monsters: "a playful delusion, which you may wonder by some was esteemed truthful, and interpreted with much erudition, foolishly enough, and to show the emptiness of the learned."

Waite suggests that the text of the *Chemical Marriage* was interpolated with its Rosicrucian symbolism after its author had read the *Fama* and *Confessio*. He overlooks a more probable alternative: that the unknown author or authors of those two manifestoes got their symbolism from the *Chemical Marriage*. That they should have seen it during the fourteen years that elapsed between its composition and the first printing of which we have record is not at all unlikely. In that event, of course, the prevalent theory that Andreae was the father of Rosicrucianism would be correct, even though his parenthood were the result of a jest. In this connection, there is no reason for thinking that the *Fama* and *Confessio* were excluded from, if not especially included in, the "other ridiculous monsters" of which Andreae said his pamphlet was prolific.

Notwithstanding his own contrary belief, there is nothing in Waite's arrangement of the evidence to show that a corporate order of Rosicrucians whose members were not consciously imposters existed before the eighteenth century, when the order seems to have grown up side by side—if not more intimately mingled—with Speculative Masonry. In *Clavis Philosophiae et Alchymiae Fluddanae*, 1633, Robert Fludd, who was informed on his subject if anyone was, seems to have summed up the result of seventeen or more years of inquiry in the sentence: "I affirm that every *Theologus* of the Church Mystical is a real Brother of the Rosy Cross, where-soever he may be and under what obedience soever of the Churches politic." This certainly does not indicate Fludd's acquaintance with any legitimate corporate body.

The Order of the Rosy and Golden Cross organized, or reorganized, by Sigmund Richter in Germany in 1710, undoubtedly became to the best of its members' belief an authentic Rosicrucian order. Thence to the present (Waite gives a chapter to American Rosicrucians) there is evidence of more or less sporadic groups of men who have employed the name and symbols of the Rosy Cross to mean whatever they liked, to further whatever purposes they happened to have, whether alchemical, medical, theosophical, or what not. Of connection between groups, even among contemporaries, of any lineage worthy of the name, there are few traces. The Stone and the Word have meant anything to any man, as he liked.

Waite chooses to discover some continuous thread of mystic purpose running from the inception of Rosicrucianism to the present day. Fortunately he does not tamper with the evidence to support any of his theories. He has cleared away fictions wherever he recognized them, regardless of their import, achieving by this means a scholarly—and as nearly authoritative as is possible in so confused a field—history of a symbol that has fascinated minds of theosophical or occult bent since early in the seventeenth century.

When I finished reading and looked up Tulip said, "You kept your face straight. Don't tell me you liked it."

"Who likes anything they've written in the past? But with the exception of a couple of points . . . Oh, well, I was an erudite fellow back in '24, wasn't I?"

"M-m-m. And you sure-God had your finger right in the hot life-pulse of daily doings too, didn't you? The man in the street must've had a hell of a time trying to figure out which way to jump till that piece came out to put him straight."

"And you figure this evens us up for your dopiness in Kiska?" I asked.

"Well if you want to play it that way it's all right, of course, but I figured it put me a little ahead."

"Can I have a copy of this? I'd forgotten it."

"You can have that. I don't blame you for wanting to burn it."

"You said you got it from a fellow in San Francisco?"

"A guy named Henkle or something. You know him? He said he used to run around with you."

"I probably know him but don't remember his name. I started to write in San Francisco."

"So he said. He had some stories about you that were pretty good, especially one about you being tied up with a couple of racketeers down in Chinatown and—"

"I remember him now, a fellow named Henley or something that I

used to see around the Radio Club. I suppose the racketeers were Bill and Paddy, unless that's just a touch you added."

"I don't add any touches. I just tell you what the man said."

"That's as unlikely a statement as I've ever heard, but all right. That was back in the days when if you ran a joint you had a body-guard whether you needed one or not, just to rate. Bill had a roly-poly middle-aged Chinese pansy whom he offered to lend me if I had anybody I wanted pushed around—like a leg broken or something—but told me not to spoil him by giving him any money. 'Five or ten dollars is all right as a tip,' he said, 'but don't spoil him by giving him any money.' I wrote the Chinese into a picture in the '30s in Hollywood, but we had a he-man director who wouldn't shoot fags, so we had to change him around."

Tulip nodded. "This Hembry, or whatever his name was, told me about the fairy gunman. He also told me you had a girl named Maggie Dobbs who was engaged to a fellow in Tokyo and—"

"He liked to talk, didn't he?"

"Yes. He had something the matter with his voice and people with something the matter with their voices always like to talk. I guess he was a kind of admirer of yours."

The dogs came in from the kitchen with Donald. The Irongates had two brown poodles and a black one. One of the browns, Jummy, was enormous for a poodle. They came over to play with me awhile and then went back to see how much petting they could get out of Tulip. Donald said good night and took the coffee things away.

Tulip, scratching one of the dog's heads, looked after Donald and said, "He walks good." I remembered that was one of the things Tulip always noticed about people. He himself was a man of only medium height but carried himself so erect he seemed taller in spite of his massive chest and shoulders, walking with a conscious sort of forward thrust as if determined never to be pushed back or caught off balance. Somebody—I think it was his friend Dr. Mawhorter—once said he could have gone anywhere if he had had a compass.

"He used to be a pretty good welter-weight fifteen or sixteen years ago, fought out of Philly under the name of Donny Brown."

"Never heard of him."

"He was pretty good just the same; but he says he didn't have the hands for it and it's a hard way for a Negro to make a living unless he thinks he's going to the top pretty soon or can't do anything else."

"It's a hard way to make a living in Philly no matter what your color is. That's a hard town to get a taxi in, too, isn't it? You have to walk out to the curb and wave your arms at 'em to attract their attention."

The dogs decided they'd got all the attention out of Tulip they were going to get for the moment and left him, Jummy going to lie down in his usual place behind the sofa and Meg settling herself for the night on the floor at the end of the sofa. Cinq, the black, still had some puppy in him, so he started moving from room to room hunting for the ideal spot to lie down, favoring places where he would be in the draft from under a door.

"You've really got troubles," I told Tulip. "Why don't you—" I broke off as a car-horn honked out in the driveway.

Tony Irongate came in lugging a couple of canvas bags. He dropped them in the doorway when the dogs converged on him. He was a smallish wiry boy of fourteen with brown eyes in a bright pale face. "Hi," he said, "what do you hear from Paulie and Gus?"

"They should be home late tomorrow or sometime Wednesday," I said and introduced him to Tulip.

Tony waded through dogs to shake hands with Tulip, then told me, "I got a new crossbow from Mingey Baker. It's got a lot of power but the bolts slip when I aim it down. Can we fix that?"

"It ought to be easy enough."

"Swell. Shall we do it tomorrow? I don't suppose Sexo and Lola have showed up yet."

"Not yet."

"Well, I'm going to get some milk and go to bed. Want anything from the kitchen?"

I said, "No, thanks," and he said, "See you in the morning," to both of us, picked up the canvas bags and went out followed by the dogs.

Tulip asked, "What's this Sexo stuff?"

"That's his nickname for his older sister this month. She's at the age when she wants to know about things and she's been asking questions."

"And you've been answering them. Oh, boy, I can just see you licking your lips and snowing her under with answers. Is she a good lay? Some kids are."

"Now, now, it's nothing like that. This hasn't got anything to do with yes or no. It's on a level you probably wouldn't understand."

"If it's nothing like that, it's a cinch I wouldn't understand it," he agreed. "I'm a yes or no man myself."

"I know," I said, "you're a dominant personality, so you go around thinking you're getting a great deal of variety but really, when you look at it for what it is, it's only masturbating in one way or another, except for a couple of times when you were outsmarted."

He laughed. "I'll have to think that over, which is more than I

can say for most of the things you tell me. Do you guess that's why it's dull sometimes, not really dull, but duller than it ought to be?"

"With your mind and your way of operating it ought to be always dull."

"You don't use your mind in that kind of operation, Pop, not if you've got anything else. That's only for writers. Look, while we're on the subject, you once told me a piece of advice you said your mother gave you. Remember?"

"She never gave me but two pieces of advice and they were both good. 'Never go out in a boat without oars, son,' she said, 'even if it's the Queen Mary; and don't waste your time on women who can't cook because they're not likely to be much fun in the other rooms either.'"

"You know your mother was dead and in her grave years before they even thought of building the Queen Mary."

"She was part Scot," I said, "and some of those people can see ahead."

"All right, but it was the other one we were talking about. There's more truth in it than I thought at first, but it's not always right."

"There aren't many things that are always right."

He got up and went over to the corner table. "I'm going to fix up my nightcap now so I can make a quick break for bed if you keep on talking like that. You're a dull bunny when you get philosophical, Pop. Why don't we just keep on talking about poontang?" He came back with his drink and sat down.

"Tulip," I said, "you look to me like a man who wants to tell me about a little girl he met in Boston and—"

"Well, it was actually in Memphis that I first ran into her, but—"

"And I hope I look to you like a man who's not going to listen, but who's about to go up to bed and read awhile before he falls asleep."

"Okay," he said good-naturedly. "I'm in no hurry to get anything off my chest, though this baby I ran across in Memphis couldn't cook worth a damn, just garlic in everything."

"You used to like garlic."

"Sure, I like it, but there's a lot of lousy cooks in this world who think you can make anything good by just slapping enough garlic in it, and then if you kick about it they grin at you like they'd caught you picking a pocket and say, 'Oh, so you don't really like garlic?' What time do you get up in the morning?"

"Around eight this time of the year, but you don't—"

"Call me when you get up. I'll have breakfast with you. Any particular reason for not telling me these Irongates were on their way home?"

"No, just my usual deviousness."

He finished his drink while I put out the lights and we went upstairs together. I went through the motions of looking into his room and bath to see that everything was all right, then said good night and went back to my own room at the other end of the hall. Cinq, the young black poodle, had made himself comfortable near the foot of my bed and after I'd undressed came over for his good-night head-scratch and pat. Then I got into bed and read Samuel's *Essay in Physics* with Einstein's polite letter declining to find anything in the Two-State Ether for a physicist to chew on.

I had meant to think about Tulip afterwards, but I got to thinking about the notion of an expanding universe being only an attempt to bootleg infinity again, and of what rearrangements would be necessary in mathematics if one, the unit, the single item, were not considered a number at all, except perhaps as a convenience in calculating. And presently I was pretty sleepy and put out the light and went to sleep.

Tony was in the dining room when I came down for breakfast, eating kippers and reading one of the newspapers. We said good morning and I sat down with another of the papers. Donald brought me orange juice and then kippers and toast. I was about halfway through my meal when Tulip joined us, and we left him to finish alone while the boy and I went out on the porch to look at the new crossbow he had asked me about the night before.

"It's brutal," Tony said as he handed it to me. "Of course all of 'em are brutal, but this is really brutal." It was a sort of cross between an arbalest and the thing those fellows in western Pennsylvania used to make out of automobile springs. "It's got all the power in the world, but—see?—the bolt slides down if you tilt it." His dark eyes were very bright. He liked weapons.

"We can fix that with a dingus here to hold the bolt back till you pull the trigger, but I don't know that I'd bother with it. You're not going to shoot down a lot. Why don't you just dab a little piece of Scotch tape across the bolt when you need to hold it there? You can't make any speed loading and cocking these things anyhow and with a little piece of tape I doubt if you'll lose anything in force or accuracy."

"Well, if you really think so," he said slowly, "but—"

I looked down at him. "But maybe I'm just trying to get out of some work? Stop talking like Tulip."

He laughed and said, "Your friend Tulip's a character, isn't he?"

"In a way, but you've got to figure that he and I play games together and you'll probably come out closer to the facts by not

believing either of us too exactly. Mostly he tries to make himself out a little worse than he is and I try to make myself out a little better. Old men cutting up old touches do a good deal of that, and a lot of male nonsense anyhow is only to impress women and children when it's not just to impress one another, or maybe themselves."

"You've told me that before," he said.

"That doesn't keep it from having some truth in it somewhere," I said. "Come on, let's take this thing over behind the garage and try it out." We went down off the porch—the screens were not up yet—and across the lawn that had the scrunchiness of early spring underfoot to the gravel road past the garage where the maples looked still a month from flowering. "They're some nice things about Tulip. One of 'em I always liked was about his education. He's a Harvard man, you know."

Tony, walking beside me carrying the crossbow and the leather bag that went with it, said, "No kidding?" in a tone that I could not quite understand. I did not always understand Tony.

"Yes. I don't know anything about Tulip's family or where he came from—he's told me things I didn't choose to believe—but anyhow he went to Harvard for four years and when they graduated him he took for granted that he was an educated man till he ran into a fellow named Eubanks down in Jacksonville the next year who explained to him that there was more to being an educated man than just going through a university, though that might be a necessary first step. Tulip had never thought of that before, but he believed it when Eubanks explained it to him and said to hell with it and stopped being an educated man."

Tony said, "Hey, I like that too," and we began to zero in the crossbow against a tree stump we had used as target for various weapons before: the ground rose steeply behind it to the hill above the old orchard. This was really a murderous weapon: it hurled its three-inch steel bolts with force and—once we had got the hang of it—accuracy. Tony grinned up at me. "It's okay, isn't it?"

I nodded. "M-m-m."

His grin widened. "And it would be just silly to complain that it's no good for anything at all except this, wouldn't it?"

"It would for us."

He sighed and nodded.

When we got back to the house Tulip was reading a morning newspaper over a cup of coffee in the puce and white ground-floor room that for some reason was called the study, a nice many-windowed booky room that opened on the long end of the lawn that ran out of sight among trees.

He looked up from his newspaper to the crossbow. "Aren't you people backing up on time a little?" he asked. "I read about ray guns and blasters and disintegrators and—"

"Phases," I said, "that defeat themselves in the end, like gunpowder. Want to walk down to the pond?"

"Sure." He finished his coffee and stood up.

I found a mackinaw for him—it was still chilly—and the three of us cut across the lawn to the pond path. Some of the juncos that hadn't yet gone back up north were scratching the ground under a bird-feeder, one of the nuthatches that lived in the black walnut tree was waddling swiftly down its trunk, a chickadee sang out and three of them flew tentatively at us.

"They're looking for sunflower seeds," Tony told Tulip. "He feeds them out of his hand."

"It's the St. Francis streak in him," Tulip said. "He's a doddering old man who's read too much, and he always has been."

The boy laughed up at him: he was walking between us. "Have you ever seen him do his fly-petting act? It's sharp."

"I can imagine," Tulip said. "Pop's really a cute kid in a lot of ways. I wish I could tell you about once in a town out near Spokane—"

"Tony's one of the people we can talk in front of," I said. We were walking along the muddy path then. It was wide enough for us to go abreast. Some of the dogwood looked almost ready to start popping open; it always hangs on the verge for weeks and weeks before anything happens.

"You mean I can tell him about that time out in the Couer d'Alenes?" Tulip asked.

"I don't know what's on your mind, but you can tell him. About the flies, there's nothing much to it. You've seen how they like to scratch their wings. Well, if you're careful not to scare 'em with the shadow of your hand when you start, and you scratch them gently on the wings they like it and will stick around. That's all there is to it."

"Okay," Tulip said. "That's why you think they like it. Now why do you think you like it?"

"In case there's anything to the theory that the insects will eventually take over the world it might be just as well to have friends among 'em."

"Isn't he a disgusting old fossil?" he asked the boy. He shook his head. "I can remember back when he had hair on it."

Tony said, "You've known each other a long time, haven't you?"

"Long enough, but you don't have to think we're such good friends. It's just that every once in a while he shows up wherever I am and hangs around for a few days. It's never very long."

Tulip said somewhat truculently over the boy's head, "You know when I show up and why I don't stay long."

When I didn't say anything Tony asked, "Do you?"

"He's nuts," I said. "I know, all right, but he's nuts just the same."

"That's easy enough to say," Tulip said indifferently.

"Hey," Tony said, "you said just now I was one of the people you could talk in front of. You're not talking in front of me; wherever you're talking it's certainly not in front of me."

Tulip poked Tony's shoulder with an elbow. "A juvenile wise guy, huh? You punks!" He scowled over the boy's head at me. "Shall we put the whole thing up to the boy and see what he says about it?"

"If you want," I said, "but you ought to know I'm making up my own mind for myself no matter who says what."

"I know that. You're an enemy of democracy."

"Not an enemy, though I don't trust its value much in small groups. Don't go around saying I'm an enemy of democracy, they'll put me in jail again."

"That's something to worry about on gloomy mornings before you've had your coffee. Look, Pop, why don't we approach this thing realistically? I—"

"Realistic is one of those words when it comes into a discussion sensible people pick up their hats and go home," I told Tony. "How'd you make out with that lamp you were going to try?"

He had had an idea—partly out of childish let's-try-and-seeness, partly out of a book on dynamic symmetry his father had around the place, partly out of knowing nobody had too much faith in the currently accepted theories of light—that a sheet of reflecting metal curled at both ends into a sort of right-angle spiral might make an economically valid lampshade. He was ignoring some heat factors, of course, or hoping to take care of them accidentally, but then what theory of lighting doesn't?

"Oh that? I never got around to it."

The dogs caught up to us as we reached the fork in the path—the left running over a hill to the McConnell's new bird sanctuary, the right going down to the pond—made their great momentary fuss over us, and went on scampering ahead, down towards where parts of the pond—all the ice had been gone for a few weeks now—were visible through still-bare trees: most of the evergreens were on the other side. It was an eight-or ten-acre spring-fed pond with a couple of small islands in it—not more than twelve feet deep at its deepest—

and some large-mouthed bass, pickerel, sunfish, snakes, frogs and snapping turtles in season. I had never tried eating water snakes, the bass were a little too muddy tasting—from the bottom—for me, but the other things made good eating. The water got too warm in the summer for trout; there's not enough oxygen in warm water for them. I thought again of the likeness of the pond to Tulip's description of the Horris woman's lake, though he had given that a stone dock while this had only a ten-foot canvas-covered wooden pier.

"Heavy paper with aluminum foil pasted on it would be as good as shiny metal," I said. "The main thing's the base and top with spiral grooves in them to guide it. Paper might be better in a way, easier to cut off or paste together when you start finding out what length gives you most light."

"You think I ought to go ahead with it, then? I thought maybe I didn't know enough about what I was doing. I'd kind of like to try it, though, if you think it's all right."

"I think it's worth trying," I said. "Knowing what you're doing is only part of good work. It's using what you know—and not only what you know about the business at hand—to find out things you don't know yet that makes good work. Almost is pretty good as a result: it's only when you get what's known as common sense and start accepting it as a goal that you're in trouble. That's the difference between a carpenter and a man who's really making something."

"My father was a carpenter," Tulip said. "I don't know that I ought to let you talk like that."

"Your father was either a pickpocket or a pimp." We had left the path and were walking over towards the little pier on the edge of the pond. I was looking at Tulip, but couldn't decide whether he looked like a man who had seen this pond before.

"But he wasn't good enough at 'em to make a full-time living that way. Most of the time he had to do carpenter work." He nodded at the pond, looking sidewise at me almost as if he knew what I was thinking. "That lake of Lee's I was telling you about looked kind of like this, except it had a stone dock and the hut was down at the water instead of back away like this one, and their lake's bigger."

What he called the hut used to be down on the edge of the pond till the Irongates had it moved back on dryer ground, and things were always bigger in Tulip's stories. That left the stone dock.

The dogs were wading in and out of the water in their usual examination of the shore-line. Twenty feet off the end of one island a pair of early-northing Canada geese or brant—I couldn't tell which at that distance—were watching us or the dogs: at this time of the year wild geese had more curiosity than timidity.

"What bothers me most," Tony said, "is the beginning of the spi-

ral's going to be too close to the lightbulb unless the whole thing's too big."

"You're figuring on a lot of spiral," I said, "and you might need a lot less than you think. Anyhow your light meter will tell you what length's best. If you want something to bother about, maybe your answer's in a three-dimensional spiral and not in the two we're fooling with."

The boy shut his dark eyes, then opened them to ask, "But how do you get light out of your three-dimensional spiral? It traps it, or most of it, doesn't it? And I'm not exactly sure how you hold this spiral—the way you mean it—down to three dimensions."

My mathematics wasn't good enough to answer any of his questions and I said so, adding, "Of course we might not be up against a mathematical problem at all. Folks call topology a branch of mathematics, but I think they're nuts, and we might be headed for topology. I don't mean only us; I mean anybody fooling with light problems."

Tony gave a little gurgle of delight when I said topology, as if I had mentioned an old friend. He used to listen one winter while Gus and I gave dimensions back to the sculptors and spent hours talking about painting having to do with the relationship in space of the surfaces of objects and nothing else. I liked topology: a few years before that I had written a story on a Möbius band, designed to be read from any point in it on around to that point again, and to be a complete and sensible story regardless of where you started. It had worked out pretty well—I don't mean perfectly; what story ever does that? But pretty well.

Tulip was throwing a stick out in the water for Cinq to swim for. The dogs used to swim a good deal till Jummy had to have some growths in his ears cut and water seemed to bother them so he stopped swimming very much and the other two didn't do things he didn't do. Cinq swam out for the stick now—head high out of the water, the way poodles swim even when not clipped for it. Jummy and Meg were wading in and out of the water around a bend in the pond shore.

Tony said to Tulip, slyly, I think, "We had an idea for a lamp, and—"

Tulip, watching the swimming black head, said, "If Pop's in on it it may be interesting in a way but it's impractical, or if it isn't impractical now it will be before he gets through with it. He's a talkative old fellow with theories and'll waste a lot of your time if you let him." He moved off to one side towards where Cinq was coming back with the stick.

"He's sulking," I told the boy.

"Well, you did dodge whatever it was he wanted to talk about when we started out. You kept saying it was all right to talk about, but you dodged it just the same."

"I hoped everybody would notice it," I said.

"It's for your own good," Tulip said, coming back to us. We were sitting on the little pier now and I was lighting a cigarette. "It's nothing to me, or not very much."

"By rights I should get up and run," I told Tony. "That's what the rules tell you to do when anybody says anything's for your own good."

Tulip groaned and sat down beside us, reaching for my cigarettes. "Don't you think anything ever gets tiresome?" he asked. "Scram," he told Cinq who arrived wet with a wet stick in his mouth. The black dog was a nice dog if still mostly puppy and went off a little distance to shake himself and lie down on the grass to chew at the stick. Tulip lit his cigarette from mine and looked over it at me. "All this fal-deral is getting us nowhere. It's leaving you just where you were before."

"Is that bad?"

"That's bad," he said with calm certainty, "and you can kid around all you want, but you know it is."

Tony sat crosslegged on the pier and watched us with bright dark eyes that pretended they weren't watching us. He didn't know what he was in the middle of, but he knew he was in the middle and he liked it. He was a nice boy. I suppose most of my talking was done to him and I think Tulip knew it and played it that way. I had always beaten Tulip by not talking, or, at least, by not talking about the things he wished to talk about.

"This time he thinks he's got me cold," I told Tony. "I'm just out of jail. The last of my radio shows went off the air while I was doing my time, and the state and federal people slapped heavy income tax liens on me. Hollywood's out during this red scare. So he figures I'll have to do another book—which doesn't take much figuring—and shows up dragging his lousy dull life behind him for me to write about."

"You'd never get it all in one book," Tulip said simply.

"I'll never get much of it in any book if I can help it," I said not so simply, because I liked Tulip most when he said things like that. "Look," I was talking to Tony again, or perhaps through him to Tulip, "I've been in a couple of wars—or at least in the Army while they were going on—and in federal prisons and I had t.b. for seven years and have been married as often as I chose and have had children and grandchildren and except for one fairly nice but pointless

brief short story about a lunger going to Tijuana for an afternoon and evening holiday from his hospital near San Diego I've never written a word about any of these things. Why? All I can say is they're not for me. Maybe not yet, maybe not ever. I used to try now and then—and I suppose I tried hard, the way I tried a lot of things—but they never came out meaning very much to me."

"I can see you wouldn't be so good to write about," Tulip said, "but that in a way is what I've been saying right along."

"Well, if I'm not," I asked, "why are you?"

"My God," he said earnestly, "I'm more interesting!"

"I don't think you are, but that's not an arguable point and anyhow hasn't anything to do with what I'm talking about."

Tulip said glumly, "I'm glad one of us knows what you're talking about," and asked Tony, "Do you know what he's talking about?"

The boy shook his head. "But he's getting at something."

Tulip said, "You're young. You've got time to wait around while he gets at things," and then to me, because he had been thinking about what I said, "What's this about grandchildren? That's new since I saw you last, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh, a girl a couple of years ago and a boy in January—since I got out of the clink. I haven't seen him yet."

"Good stuff, good stuff. They out in California?" and when I had nodded, "The daughter you liked so much?"

"I liked both of my children."

Tulip raised his thick sandy eyebrows at Tony. "A stuffy old fellow sometimes, isn't he?" He turned back to me. "I'm an illiterate; you'll have to explain to me why being a more interesting character doesn't make me better to write about. You don't have to explain it, but you'll have to if you want me to understand you."

"Let's try it this way," I said to or through the boy. "I'm in a lung hospital in 1920, out in a converted Indian school on Puyallup Road in the fringes of Tacoma, Washington. Most of us were what came to be known as disabled veterans of World War I, but the Veterans Administration hadn't any hospitals of its own in those days—maybe hadn't even been organized under that name—so the United States Public Health Service took care of us in its hospitals. In this one about half of us were lungers; the other half what was then called shell shock victims, segregated as far as sleeping quarters and eating were concerned because I suppose some sort of control was kept over them—we didn't have much—and because they might catch t.b. from us. It was a nice sloppily run hospital and I think most of us who took it easy beat the disease—it's the lungers I'm talking about; I don't know how the shell shocks (goofs in our language) made out—

while the more conscientious ones, those who chased the cure, died of it. The major in charge of the hospital was reputed to be a lush, but I don't remember any evidence of that. I remember, though, that he was afraid of the newly formed American Legion and we used that to beat him over the head with whenever he tried to get strict, though I think most of us belonged to another organization called the Disabled Veterans. Our standard defense against any and all attempts to impose anything approaching control over us was the statement—made sulkily or triumphantly, mumbled or shouted, depending on who made it and what the circumstances were—*We're not in the Army now!* Our doctors and nurses—most of them freshly out of the Army themselves—got pretty tired of hearing it, but it was a long long time before we got tired of saying it. We got either eighty or sixty dollars a month compensation from the government—I can't remember the exact figure—though I suppose it must have varied with our degree of sickness, since thermometers were called compensation sticks; enough free cigarettes to help out, though not enough to keep a reasonably heavy smoker fully supplied; free room and board, of course; and we didn't need many clothes. It wasn't a bad life. All liquor was bootleg then—except for the occasional snort you could wheedle out of a nurse or doctor—and the stuff we bought was pretty bad but it was strong; lights were put out at probably ten o'clock, but the room I shared with a kid from Snohomish had been a matron's room in the old Indian-school days and was on the same electric light circuit as the toilet, so we had only to hang a blanket over the window to play poker as late as we wished; as I remember it we came into and went out of the hospital as we liked, needing a pass only for overnight trips to Seattle and such, though there may have been certain times we were supposed to be on hand. Anyhow most of us found it a lot better than working for a living. Sometimes we were broke: I remember Whitey Kaiser—a powerfully built squat blond Alaskan with most of the diseases known to man; he could hit like a pile driver, but his knucklebones would crumble like soda crackers—borrowing a blackjack from me—I had come to the hospital from working for a detective agency in Spokane and you're always picking up things like that when you're young—and giving it back to me the next morning with ten bucks. When I read in an afternoon paper about a man being slugged and robbed of a hundred and eighty dollars on the Puyallup Road—it ran from Tacoma to Seattle—the night before, I showed it to Whitey, who said people who were robbed always exaggerated the amounts. Sometimes we were flush: there was a lean hatchet-faced dark boy named Gladstone who finally got his bonus from the Army—a sizable sum, though I don't remem-

ber the amount any more—and spent it all for two used cars and the collected works of James Gibbons Huneker because he wanted culture and I'd told him Huneker had it. Most of the time we were bored. I suppose we bored pretty easily. I don't mean we were badly bored—though we may have been sometimes—but just bored. The weather out there's pretty good, you know. It rains at least once every day from September to May, but seldom very hard, and it doesn't get very cold, so you don't have to bother with an overcoat, but just automatically take a raincoat along when you go out and—"

The three dogs from three different places began barking and racing for the path along which we had come, vanishing noisily around a bend.

I said, "Visitors," while Tony was saying, "Do and Lola, I guess," and Tulip threw his cigarette end out on the water to hiss and dissolve.

Presently the three poodles came scampering back around the path's bend with the two Irongate girls walking behind them. Do was a lean blondish girl of sixteen, Lola a dark-eyed dark-haired pink-cheeked very pretty plump girl of twelve. Lola looked like her father and Tony, Do didn't look like anybody I'd seen though I'd been told—everybody has to take after somebody in most families—she resembled one of her aunts. They exchanged "Hi's" with Tony, kissed me and shook hands with Tulip.

Lola said, "Those people will be home this evening." She was excited.

Do said, "They'd never think of telling us whether they mean for dinner or afterwards." She was excited.

Tony said, "Now it's dinner we've got to worry about." He was excited.

I said it was fine, which it was because I hadn't seen the senior Irongates since I got out of prison: they had simply sent me word that the house and any money I needed was mine and they would be back from Florida as soon as Gus finished his painting chores there.

Tulip caught my eye, mutely asking if he would be in the way. I started to shake my head no, thought better—or anyhow differently: why should I make him think I wanted him to stay?—of it and shrugged.

Lola sat down on the pier close to me and asked hopefully, "Are we butting in on anything?" She wore dark-blue ski pants and a short scarlet coat.

I said, "No."

Tulip, sitting down again, said, "I guess Pop was telling the story of his life; I don't know."

Do said, "Pop?" and then to me, "Oh, you," and laughed. She had a nice firm-lipped smile. "I like that," she told Tulip.

Lola leaned against me and said, "I want to hear the story of your life, Pop."

"You won't hear it from me, honey."

"You call everybody honey."

"I used to call everybody darling," I said, "but now I think honey's more refined."

Do said, "We are interrupting, aren't we?" She still stood, looking taller and leaner than she was in a long brown polo coat a couple of sizes too large for her. "Aren't we, Tony?"

Her brother, glancing first at me, said, "Well, yes."

"You're not doing anything," Tulip said. "If Pop wants to go ahead with what he was saying he'll go ahead. If he doesn't he'll pretend you interrupted him. Sit down and leave it up to him."

Do sat down.

Tony said, "You were at the part where you were bored and it was raining."

"Well the rain didn't mean very much," I said. "It wasn't that kind of rain. And I don't suppose the boredom meant a lot either. None of us had been out of the Army very long and we must have been used to it. This," I explained to Lola and Do, "was a lung hospital out in Tacoma right after the First World War. The last time I saw Pavlova dance was that time in Tacoma, though that hasn't anything to do with anything. About the boredom, I'm not even sure I remember it. Maybe I just know that we must've been. Somebody told the citizens of Tacoma they were neglecting us and for two or three Sundays we had visitors. Atrocity stories were popular then—especially the ones that had to do with soldiers' tongues being cut out—and we used to persuade hospital orderlies to sit in wheel chairs and let us push them up to gullible visitors to curdle their blood—or make them happy, which was often the same thing—with the most fantastic horrors we could think of.

"An ex-Marine named Bizzarri and I were pretty good friends. There's a gag that for God knows how many years or decades or centuries has been banging around lumber and construction camps—any place men have to work and live together and get tired of it—where two men build up a fake animosity leading to a climactic fist fight—or gun fight or knife fight, depending on where it is—and then instead of fighting laugh at the assembled audience and go off arm in arm. Well, this Bizzarri and I built up one of those things, nursing it along carefully until we had most of the hospital intensely interested, some taking one side, some the other, in this thing that had happened

to two once-close friends; and we went out for our final violent showdown and took a couple of pokes at each other that were on the borderline between fake and real, but were both too intelligent to pass up our laugh by going at it in earnest, so we stopped in time to get our laugh, but were never very good friends after that.

"A Filipino whose name I've forgotten was studying to be a crooked gambler—in civilian life he seems to have lost his wages each Saturday night in a Chinese gambling joint—and had a deck of marked cards that we used to let him sneak into the poker game once in a while, since most of us knew the markings better than he did. He got into a fight once—crooked gamblers have to be very touchy on points of honor—and his opponent had to wait while the Filipino went to his room for a pair of kid gloves, to protect his skin, I suppose, since they weren't weighted in the palms, had no stitching to amount to anything and were a little too tight to let him close his hands into effective fists. We liked things of those sorts, so I guess we were bored."

I was floundering a little now. Talking through Tony had seemed to make things easier for me, as Tulip had probably known, but I hadn't been able to find the key to this new combination. I don't mean that Do and Lola were likely to be an unsympathetic audience. They weren't. They liked me, and jail had even given me glamor, but what I was talking about—or trying to talk about—hadn't anything to do with that. A better talker would probably have gone on as before, ignoring them, but I had—or thought I had—to find some way of including them. I could have broken off, of course, waiting to go on when I had Tony and Tulip to myself again, but I suppose I felt like talking. So I went on, doing the best I could to tie them in along the way.

"Then the government opened, or reopened, a hospital down near San Diego—the old Army hospital in what had been Camp Kearney—and fourteen of us were transferred down there, mostly the undesirable cut-ups, I reckon. We went down in a private sleeping car, picking up a few more members at Portland. We had a couple among us who thought, or said, they were hopheads, a one-legged chap named Austen—they thought he had a tubercular infection of the bone and kept whittling pieces off his leg—and an ugly redhead named Quade with tubercular intestines. Whitey and I were broke, but among his diseases he had something wrong with his kidneys and the doctor at Tacoma had given him some white powders to take, folded up in bundles just like dope, so we peddled them to Austen and Quade throughout the trip and they sniffed them and got—or thought they got—a good bang out of them all the way to San Diego.

In the Camp Kearney hospital we ran into our enemy—regulations. We got there late at night and were awakened at an early hour by a night orderly who wanted urine specimens before he went off duty. That was easy, of course: we told him where to go for his urine specimens and went back to sleep and he went off-duty without the specimens. Then we found out that not only would we have to have passes to leave the hospital—Tijuana, wide open just across the border, had been a major reason for our willingness to come here: Agua Caliente hadn't been opened yet—but they were issued only stingily, and, on top of that, we as newcomers would have to spend two weeks in a quarantine ward before we were eligible for anything, even for permission to wander around the hospital. So we revolted happily and announced that we were leaving the hospital for San Diego. The management had us over for a conference, cut the quarantine period to ten days, as I now remember it, but stuck to the other rules, and we went outside for our own conference, by this time most of us cheerfully looking forward to San Diego and Tijuana with the local Red Cross to throw ourselves on when we were broke. And then up the duckwalk past us came one of the hospital's civilian employees, a pretty little girl in a striped shirtwaist and dark skirt with nice legs in silk stockings that had a run up the back of one, and our revolt went blooey: we decided maybe the hospital wouldn't be so bad after all—and we could always leave when we wanted to—and sent Whitey, who had become our spokesman by now, in to tell the commanding officer we were staying. (None of us ever got anywhere with the pretty little girl; I'm not sure any of us tried very hard.) One of us—I've forgotten which—had by this time got himself sincerely convinced there was some principle involved in our revolt and vanished San Diegoward. The rest of us settled down to the new routine of a new hospital. Whitey wasn't with us long; after a few weeks he and another chap came back from the city pretty tight one night and he slugged a doctor—I think because the doctor had given Whitey's companion a shot of apomorphine for his drunkenness—and got thrown out. There was some talk about our leaving with him, but nothing came of it and he went on his way.

"The hospital was on the edge of a desert, so there were horned toads to make pets of, and battles between rattlesnakes and Gila monsters to stage in an empty boxcar on a nearby unused railroad track—the Gila monsters always won, but most of the sucker money backed the rattlers at first, and when there was no rattler money to be had we stopped staging the fights—and there was Tijuana to hit every couple of weeks. I still don't remember much about San Diego except that it was nice to look at riding downhill towards it between pink

and pale-blue stucco houses, the U.S. Grant Hotel and the tonic stores where in those Prohibition days you bought and drank from a great variety of high-alcohol-content patent medicines. I suppose I read a good deal in the hospital, but I can't remember a single thing I read there. I know I had a good time in Camp Kearney, but when the races closed at Tijuana—in May, I think—I asked for a discharge from the hospital and they gave it to me. They couldn't say I was an arrested case—I didn't finally lick my t.b. until five or six years later—so they wrote *maximum improvement reached* and let me go."

When I stopped talking to light a cigarette Lola asked, "Where'd you go?"

Tony said, "Sh-h-h," to her.

"Back to Spokane, because they gave me a railroad ticket there and I wanted to see some people, then over to Seattle for a week or two—it was a noisy city but I liked it then—and down to San Francisco for what I meant to be at most a two-month stay before going home to Baltimore. But I stayed in San Francisco seven or eight years, and never did get back to Baltimore except on short visits. But what I'm getting at is," I was talking to Tony and Tulip again, "that out of all this I got only one brief and fairly pointless story about a quiet lunger going to Tijuana for a placid day's outing. And that's more writing material than I got out of wars and prisons. And you"—to Tulip—"can only bring me that kind of stuff: in one way or another your whole lousy life's been like that, which may be fine and dandy but it's not for me. I don't know what to do with it."

"As a matter of fact," Tulip said, "I've never had t.b. and the three guys I remember called Whitey were different from yours, though one of them managed a semi-pro ball team I played third base on one summer and gyped us out of our share. But I can see why none of the things that happened to you were any good. They were happening to the wrong guy. You've got to think everything comes through the mind, and of course things get dull when you reason the bejesus out of 'em that way." He looked at Tony. "Isn't that right, kid?"

Tony looked at Tulip and at me and didn't say anything.

"You and your immature emotions that can't bear the weight of sense," I said somewhat didactically because I was tired of this accusation. "No feeling can be very strong if it has to be shielded from reason. Drunken wife-beaters crying over a lame bird."

Lola asked, "What about this Whitey that managed the baseball team?"

Tony sh-h-hed her again.

Tulip said, "I don't always know what you're talking about, Pop. But couldn't you just write things down the way they happen and let your reader get what he wants out of 'em?"

"Sure, that's one way of writing, and if you're careful enough in not committing yourself you can persuade different readers to see all sorts of different meanings in what you've written, since in the end almost anything can be symbolic of anything else, and I've read a lot of stuff of that sort and liked it, but it's not my way of writing and there's no use pretending it is."

"You whittle everything down to too sharp a point," Tulip said. "I didn't say you ought to let your reader run hog-wild on you like that, though I can't see any objections to letting them do your work for you if they want to, but—"

"Not enough want to to make it profitable," I said, "though you're likely to get nice reviews."

"Money, money," Tulip said, which would have been funny from him except that we were arguing and in arguments you are inclined to say things that will help your side win.

"Sure, money," I said. "When you write you want fame, fortune and personal satisfaction. You want to write what you want to write and to feel that it's good and to sell millions of copies of it and have everybody whose opinion you value think it's good, and you want this to go on for hundreds of years. You're not likely to ever get all these things, and you're not likely to give up writing or commit suicide if you don't, but that is—and should be—your goal. Anything less is kind of piddling."

Do, who was seriously preparing herself for approaching womanhood and thought that women tried to keep men from quarreling, said, "I told Donald we'd have an early lunch. Is that all right?" while Tony scowled at her.

I said, "It's all right with me," and looked at my wristwatch: 11:54. "Want to go back to the house now?"

Tulip said, "Pop, did I ever tell you there were certain points on which I don't see exactly eye to eye with you?" as we stood up.

The dogs had disappeared into the woods beyond the pond. We went back up the path with Tulip and Do ahead, Lola, Tony and I walking abreast behind them. When we were past the old stone pumphouse—now a smokehouse—and cutting across the back lawn towards the house, Tony said, "You didn't finish what you were getting at, did you?"

"No, I'm not sure I got at it at all. I think I got myself sidetracked. Roughly speaking, there are two kinds of thinking in the world: that you use to try to make points, win arguments with, and that you use to find out things. We'll try it again sometime."

Lola asked, "Can I listen?"

I said, "Sure," with Tony giving me a quick smile because he thought I didn't mean it.

I got to thinking then about the first time I had ever seen Tulip, at Mary Mawhorter's house in Baltimore in 1930. I had gone down to Baltimore for a week on my way from New York to my first job in Hollywood—my father was still alive then and my sister lived in Baltimore too—and had of course looked up Mary, who was now a pediatrician, and Tulip was one of the people at her house the night I went over there. He was bossing a gang of Negro stevedores, I think, on the Sparrow's Point piers of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the way I remember it is that he had been a third baseman in the Yankee farm system but had quit because there was no future in that line of work as long as Red Rolfe held on. However, Red Rolfe didn't come up to the Yankees till later and must have still been playing shortstop at Dartmouth when I first met Tulip, so the chances are I'm getting Tulip mixed up with an Army sergeant I ran into on the rifle range at Sea Girt in 1942. I drank a lot in those days, partly because I was still confused by the fact that people's feelings and talk and actions didn't have much to do with one another, and a great many of my memories are hazy. The Red Rolfe pattern fits Tulip, though, even if the dates let him out.

He liked Mary—she was a tall white-skinned brunette and very attractive and nice—but, out of male vanity or his kind of humor, was trying to get to her the hard way and not at that time making much progress. She was a good-humored girl but she took her profession very seriously and he didn't. He said he needed a physical examination and wanted to come to her as a patient and she said she didn't treat grown-ups and anyhow he only want to "play doctor" with her and that was kid stuff, and they made this their principal bone of bantering contention at the moment. She talked about him a good deal when I went back to her place later after the others had gone. She always talked a good deal and never used a three-syllable word if she could find a four-syllable one to take its place—that professional jargon you get a lot of from doctors and from others who think there is something esoteric about their line of work—but she was nice and didn't mind if you just lay there and smoked a cigarette and said, "Uh-huh," once in a while and let her babble on. She was a nice girl. She seemed to like Tulip.

He was then in his late twenties—just a couple of years older than Mary—and already had the idea that his life had been interesting and somebody ought to write about it. I didn't mind that so much because I had been writing for eight years and was used to people telling me stories and plots and things, to which I would pretend to listen politely while thinking of something else, but I suppose I was still a little touchy about the common notion that all writers had to be pallid

bookkeeperish folk sitting at desks doing paper work, and it seemed to me that this husky youngster was putting it on pretty thick and rubbing it in, so we didn't get along very well. It wasn't so much that I was quarrelsome when I drank as that I forgot not to be. I don't know whether he was drunk, too; people have to be pretty drunk for me to notice it, even now that I don't drink.

This is how I remember the significant part of what was done and said that night, though it was a long time ago and I don't know how much I may have changed things around to make me look better or to prove my case. Anyhow, there were perhaps a dozen people there and after I got through the introductory bows and handshakes and words Mary left me in a corner with Tulip while she went to get us something to drink, and he said, "So this is your home town, huh?"

"Yes. I grew up here except for a little while in Philadelphia, though I was born down in the southern part of the state."

"Been away long?"

"Ten or eleven years, I guess."

"You'll find it a pretty dull town now."

"It was then."

"But it's uglier now," he said and I asked, "What town isn't?" and he said, "But that isn't what I want to talk to you about," so I knew he wanted to talk to me about something.

Mary came back with our drinks then and a little brown-eyed girl from Catonsville who said she wanted me to look up a friend of hers in Pasadena but kept talking to me for Tulip's benefit. She finally wandered away and he said, "Look. You write and I don't, but you come pretty close to being my kind of writer and I'd like to talk to you."

That was all right. I liked Tulip and still like him, though not as much as he supposes.

"I get around a lot more than you do," he said, "and I see a lot of things."

It stopped being all right. In the first place I didn't think he got around much more than I did, and in the second place even then I didn't think that was the answer unless you wanted to write railroad time-tables from actual experience. Everybody has twenty-four hours a day, no more and seldom less, and one way of putting in the time seems as filling to me as another, depending of course on your own nature, so I said, "Yes?" and began to look around the room.

"Look," he insisted, "I don't mean you just know libraries and colleges and things. I wouldn't be picking on you if you were that kind of a writer. But I've got a lot of stuff in here," and he actually thumped his chest.

I thumped my head. "Then find a writer with a lot of stuff in here," I advised him, "and you'll make a good pair."

He said, "Oh, for God's sake," disgustedly and Mary, who could see we were not making out together very well, came over to see how we were making out. "Your friend is kind of touchy," he told her.

"Your friend is kind of touching," I told her.

Mary laughed and put a long white arm around each of us. "Want to tell me?"

I said, "No," and Tulip said, "No," and then he said to me, "Let me give you an example, tell you one of these things so you'll see what I mean."

"If it's not too gruesome why don't you let him tell you?" Mary said, and I knew she was being very earnest about something because she hadn't used any word with more than two syllables in it and only one of those, and that wasn't her natural way of talking. "Here, I'll get you something to drink," and she took our glasses and went away.

I said, "All right, then," and he told me the first of the many stories he told me or tried to tell me from then on.

This one was about some poor people in Providence who all seemed to have the right kind of feelings about everything that happened to them or around them, and a lot happened, but they kept having the proper feelings so none of it meant very much to me. Mary came back with our drinks and stood listening to the last two-thirds of the story. Tulip didn't say anything when he had finished telling it and neither did she.

"It's nice," I said, "but isn't it kind of literary?"

Tulip's face reddened a little, it seemed to me, under the deep sunburn he had got working on the docks, and he said, "I guess I did dress it up a little, maybe too much," and then when I didn't say anything, "But it really did happen, you know," and then when I still didn't say anything, "How do I know how much to dress things up?"

Mary said to me, "It's not necessary to be so insufferable," which was closer to her normal way of talking and made me think she had been anxious for me to listen to Tulip, but didn't care much one way or the other what I thought about him.

"What do you want?" I asked them.

Mary laughed and said, "You know what I want. Hand it down," while Tulip scowled at me and ran a big thick-fingered hand back through his hair. "How long are you going to be in town?" he asked.

"Three or four days more. Maybe a day or two after that, though I'd like to get out to Santa Monica to see my kids."

"How many have you got?" he asked.

"Two. A boy of eight and the girl must be about four now. A lot of people stop when they've got one of each."

The Catonsville girl came over and said, "You're two such nice men and here you've been hiding in this corner all evening just talking to each other." She said it mostly to me and mostly for Tulip, so I let him have her presently, moving away with Mary.

Tulip called after us, "I can get hold of you through the doctor, can't I?"

Mary and I nodded yes, and I asked her, "What's eating him?"

She shook her head. "It's difficult to conceive of anything eating him. I should imagine that what engaged him back there was his preoccupation with congruity. He devotes considerable attention to the various theories that a somewhat consecutive—though not necessarily chronological—course of events—no matter how dissimilar they may seem—gives life—or any life, for that matter, including perhaps most importantly his own—a—or it may be the—form. But nothing's exactly eating him."

"Oh," I said, "and he wants me to sort out the beads and string them for him?"

"You or somebody."

"What does he suppose people try to do with their own lives?"

"Surely you're not naïve enough to expect people to have any conception of what occupies other people or even to possess any awareness that other people have any interior occupations," she said, and she was pretty enough and I'd had enough to drink to make what she said seem sensible to me, so I changed the subject and we began to talk about us, and that was nice, and then some other people joined us or we joined them, and that was nice too. Everything was nice at that time.

Later Tulip found me in a small sort of sitting-room affair in the back second-story—Mary had an old three-story house just off Cathedral Street—with a small semi-blonde girl named Mrs. Hatcher or something of the sort, and after she had gone away he said, "I wanted to talk to you, but I didn't mean to bust up anything."

"To tell you the truth, I don't know whether you did or you didn't."

"Oh, all right, then," he said and sat down, and started to offer me a cigarette and saw I had one, and I refilled the semi-blonde's glass and gave it to him. This was the Prohibition era, of course, and Baltimore seemed to be drinking more Scotch and less rye than I remembered. "We don't get along, do we?" he said after he had taken a drink, "and it's a shame because I think we could do each other a lot of good."

I must have shrugged then—I always liked to shrug—and said something about one of the nice things about being a man was that mankind could survive anything.

“Sure, sure,” he said. “I’m not saying it’s important. I’m just saying it’s a shame, not even a big shame if that bothers you, but a little one like only having brown shoes to wear with blue pants.”

I didn’t believe him—or I don’t now, and it’s now that I’m trying to remember what went on at that time—so I kept quiet except for whatever noises I made breathing or smoking. I don’t mean that I didn’t believe what he said, but I didn’t believe that he felt it, and even back then, the first time I met him, and full of alcohol as I was, I had a wary feeling that he might come to represent a side of me. His being a side of me was all right, of course, since everybody is in some degree an aspect of everybody else or how would anybody ever hope to understand anything about anybody else? But representations seemed to me—at least they seem now, and I suppose I must have had some inkling of the same opinion then, devices of the old and tired, or older and more tired—to ease up, like conscious symbolism, or graven images. If you are tired you ought to rest, I think, and not try to fool yourself and your customers with colored bubbles.

[Tulip was never completed and the manuscript ends here. But Hammett evidently wrote the very end of the book, and this is it, *L.H.*]

Two or three months later I heard Tulip was in a Minneapolis hospital, where he had had a leg amputated. I went out to see him and showed him this.

“It’s all right, I guess,” he said when he had read it, “but you seem to have missed the point.”

People nearly always think that.

“But I’ll read it again if you want me to,” he added. “I hurried through it this first time, but I’ll read it again kind of carefully if you want me to.”